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Wild Kirke, the Renegade

THE TRAPPER'S LAST TRAIL

BY JOSEPH L. HENDERSON,
AUTHOR OF "THE WHITE CHIEF," (DIME NOVEL NO. 359.)

34

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My Readers from Grafton

KIRKE, THE RENEGADE.

CHAPTER I.

~~ALONE!~~

Bros. frat

Lost on the prairie!

It would be impossible to describe my feelings as the truth flashed upon me, and I realized that I was actually lost on the illimitable prairie. On every side, as far as the eye could reach, lay the level plain, and not a single tree or shrub was in sight. I knew that I was lost, and that it would be useless to travel further.

It happened in the following manner.

Harry Sprague and I were intimate friends, and had been since early childhood, as we were born and brought up in the same city and in the same neighboring families.

I doubt if two chums were ever more attached to each other.

We were schooled together; were classmates through our entire course of studies, and as older we grew our intimacy grew stronger. The fact that we were nearly alike in disposition and personal appearance, and were almost invariably together, led many to think that we were brothers.

Harry was a noble fellow, and no wonder I liked him; good-natured, lively and full of fun, of a pleasing disposition, kind and generous to a fault. He was slow to take offense, and he was never known willingly to offend others. His enemies were few indeed, for he had a kind word or jovial remark for all, and in society he was always sure to keep his friends in a good humor.

None ever thought of such a thing as being offended by Harry's pleasant jokes and witty hits.

But, although generally merry and gay, he could sit for

hours and converse on different topics with as much seriousness and good sense as anybody. He was just the sort of a fellow one likes for a friend and confidant, and a sort that is not too often met with.

Like myself, he was naturally fond of travel, eager to behold the many curiosities of the world, and no sooner were we let loose from college, than, like many other young men of our age, we resolved to leave home for awhile.

It was just at the time that the gold mania was raging all over the country, and we agreed that our first trip should be to California, where so many were going.

It was not a desire for wealth that prompted us to go thither, for we were not in want, nor was it probable that we would ever be, as far as money was concerned. Neither was it to hunt wild beasts and fight Indians, for we never burned for adventure; but merely to see the country out West, and to cross the great western plains of which we had heard so much.

We started in high spirits, traveling by rail to Cincinnati, and from thence to St. Louis by water.

Arriving at St. Louis we made preparations for the long journey before us. Each of us purchased a full hunter's outfit, with good rifle, knife, pistols and ammunition, of which last we procured a good supply.

At Independence we completed our preparations by procuring a couple of good horses, and joining an emigrant-train that was soon to leave that place.

In a few days we were off. The long train of wagons, with their white covers, slowly wended its way westward like a huge reptile creeping slowly but steadily toward the great El Dorado. Harry and I rode in the rear the greater part of the time, in the company of a small party of men, who, like ourselves, were mounted on horses.

Day after day the caravan moved on, under the superintendence of a skillful guide, who had spent two-thirds of his life on the prairies. We were not molested, which was better than we expected, for we had heard repeatedly, before starting, that the Indians were becoming troublesome since so many whites were emigrating to California and Oregon.

At an early hour one morning, before the people were stir-

Grown on the furor

ring much in camp, I arose for a little tramp in search of game. Not that we were in need of food, but merely for my own amusement, as I had killed nothing but a single wild turkey since our departure from Independence.

I would not go far, and I would certainly return before the wagons were on the move.

Even if they did start before my return I could follow in their wake and overhaul them, so I need have no fear of being left.

Flinging my rifle over my shoulder, I sauntered from the camp.

My horse I left behind, as I had grown heartily tired of riding and wished to exercise my limbs a little. A short tramp would make me feel more able to perform the tiresome task of riding another whole day on horseback, and besides I might find a chance of bringing down something that would afford fresh meat for Harry's breakfast and mine.

I walked briskly away in a southerly direction, enjoying exceedingly the fresh morning air coming down from the mountains visible in the west. I became deeply absorbed in a "brown study," and moved rapidly on without looking back, never once thinking that I would go too far.

When I did look back I saw that I had gone much further than I had intended. The camp was far away, and I could see that the wagons were beginning to move.

Rather dissatisfied at having walked such a great distance unintentionally, I turned quickly about to retrace my steps, knowing that I would have to walk fast and far to overtake my fellow-travelers. I knew, however, that if Harry should see me coming he would come to meet me with my horse, but it was hardly probable that he would see me.

But I had not traversed five ~~paces~~ ^{for} of the distance that lay between me and the camp, when I espied a small herd of deer a little to my left, slowly coming toward me.

I instantly forgot the caravan, and turned my attention to the deer.

Here, I thought, was an excellent opportunity to procure some fresh venison, and I resolved to avail myself of it.

Dropping down upon the ground, I lay at full length in the green grass, waiting for the deer to approach within rifle-range.

that I might shoot into them. But before they came so near they stopped, and, after sniffing the air a moment, the leader, a fine-looking buck which I had hoped to shoot, wheeled round and bounded swiftly away in the opposite direction, closely followed by the rest.

I jumped up and pursued, unwilling to lose all of them. They soon stopped again, and stood staring at me as I approached, but they would not allow me to get near enough to fire into them before they bounded away again. Not yet disengaged, for I was a novice in this kind of sport, and thought by pursuing them I would soon be able to bring one of them down, I started after them again.

This was continued for at least an hour, and I was being led further and further away from my friends, but still no nearer to the herd of deer.

At length I gave it up as a task not to be accomplished, and once more turned to retrace my steps. The sun was well up in the heavens, and I knew I had been wasting too much time, so the quicker I returned the better it would be for me. I was alarmed to find that the camp was in sight no longer. It had doubtless broken up long ere this time, and was a considerable distance on its way.

Angry at myself at having been so foolish, and fearful lest I would not be able to join the emigrants again, I set out in what I supposed to be the right direction. But I must have been wrong.

When noon came I had not reached the deserted camp, nor had I seen the trail of the wagons. I must have taken the wrong course, but I would not admit that I was lost. I trudged on, my fears growing greater every moment, but still clinging to the hope that I might yet chance upon the trail of the caravan and thus be enabled to follow it.

Vain hope! The sun was setting, when, weary and foot sore, I found that I had traveled all day for nothing. I had formed a complete circle, and now I was no nearer my destination than when I started!

I was lost—lost on the open prairie—no human being or habitation in sight; not even a tree—nothing save the waving grass could be seen wherever I looked.

Yes, something more. The bluish peaks of the Rocky

Mountains were dimly outlined in the western horizon, and the sun, like a red ball of fire, was slowly sinking behind them. Soon I would be surrounded by darkness ; there alone in that strange place, with no friends near, no enemies, nothing to keep me from starving. I was very hungry, as I had eaten nothing that day, having left the camp before breakfast.

What must I do ? What *could* I do ? I would remain there and do nothing, as no good could come of walking further. I would remain here till morning, and then I would try to find some kind of an animal or fowl that was fit to eat. I had a little ammunition, and with that I might obtain food enough to keep me alive for awhile, but if it should give out, and find me still a lone wanderer in this uninhabited region, I would have no alternative but to lie down and yield up the ghost.

Lost on the prairie ! My heart sunk within me at the thought, and I heartily wished that my roving disposition had not led me westward. But it had, and, in all probability, I would have to pay dearly for it.

Often, in ~~my city home~~, I had read of people being in the predicament I was in, but I never fully realized what it was till experience taught me.

I sat down on the ground to rest my weary limbs. My long, circuitous journey, which had very nearly lasted from morning till night, and which I had performed without a morsel to eat, had completely broken me down, and tired, weak, hungry and half sick, I stretched myself on the ground, unable to stand longer. I gave myself up to gloomy reflections.

Had I not been alone, I would not have been so despondent.

I thought how much more cheerful I would have been had Harry been with me, though of course, at the same time, I was glad that he was not. It would be much better if, on the morrow, I should meet with an old trapper on his way to Independence, to dispose of his furs. I would accompany him thither, and remain in that place until I could hear from Harry, or until another caravan should start across the plains. I knew I would not be so careless a second time.

But it was not likely that this would happen—that such

good-luck would be mine so soon after this misfortune had befallen me.

Alone! Oh for company then! How much better I could have borne up. Some one to talk with, and to help make the time pass a little more pleasantly.

Even my horse would have been better than nothing; in fact, he might have been more useful than a fellow-creature, for I resolved to be on the move from morning till night on the morrow, and, with him under me, I could, of course, travel much easier and further than I could on foot.

It was very easy to imagine things that would better my condition, but to think and wish could do no good. I partially consoled myself with the remembrance that "all's for the bes'," and sunk back to see if it were possible to win the spirit of sleep to my eyes, and thus rest for a time in sweet forgetfulness of the sad misfortunes that had overtaken me so early in my wanderings.

CHAPTER II.

A LIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE.

NIGHT came on. Darkness enveloped the earth, and I still lay on that wide prairie, unable to sleep, looking up at the black, star-bedecked sky, thinking of Harry, home, parents, friends, and a hundred other things that crowded into my mind.

I did not despair. I did not really think that I was going to die there, neither did I allow fear to take possession of me knowing how more than possible it was that I might be saved.

Perhaps I might meet somebody that could guide me to place of safety.

Even if I should fall into the hands of a band of Indians, which would probably be the case, I might stand a chance of retaining my life, and find a home with them for awhile. At any rate, if these uncivilized fellows should capture me, the fate they would have in store for me could hardly be worse than starving there alone, and being devoured by wild beasts.

Thus ran my thoughts as I lay there and watched the host of bright stars twinkling in the dark sky above me.

After awhile, just as I was beginning to despair of going to sleep, I sunk gradually into a state of unconsciousness.

How long I remained thus would be impossible to tell, but when I awoke it was with a sudden start, caused by a frightful crisis in a terrible dream.

Rising to a sitting position, I gazed about me, frightened and bewildered. All was darkness yet, and the stars were still glimmering in the heavens, like thousands of wakeful eyes watching over me as I slept.

Far out in the prairie I could hear the sharp, peculiar bark of the small prairie-wolf, and further on the faint yelp and howl of the larger and fiercer mountain-wolf.

Finding that I was uninjured, and that my dream was only a dream, I concluded to lie down and sleep again. The cool mountain air was rather uncomfortable now, and I drew the cape of my hunting-shirt over my head, to see if that would do any good in the way of helping me to sleep comfortably.

In the act of lying down, I turned my body half around, and as I did so my eyes alighted on something that instantly arrested my movements and claimed my attention.

What was it?

That might be easily guessed. What could be seen in such darkness but a light?

Indeed I actually saw the glimmering light of a camp-fire, looking like a tiny star on the ground, and apparently at no great distance from where I was reclining!

The sight was unexpected, and for a minute I could not make out to believe I was fully awake.

But a trifle I was, and not deceived. The fire was really there—plainly seen. I had not seen it before, for the reason that I had been lying on my back since nightfall without looking about me. But now I saw it, and so plainly that I knew there could be no mistake.

After staring at it in wonder for several minutes, I sprung to my feet, scarcely able to repress an exclamation of joy.

Was I about to be saved? Were friends near, able and willing to guide me away from this horrid place? My heart

beat wildly, and I almost danced, so delighted was I at the prospect of being saved. But were they friends?

They might be enemies—a roving band of hostile Indians camping there so near to me. If this was the case I could not find it out in a better way than to go and see, and see I would if I could get near enough.

On the other hand, it could possibly be a white man—a hunter, who made his home in this wild, unsettled country. If so, I would stand a chance of finding a good, kind-hearted friend, who would do all that was in his power to place me on the right path to safety. If it was a white, it was hardly possible that it was an enemy, though I had heard that a few outlaws infested this region, besides the red inhabitants.

I didn't wait to think what it might be, for I was so delighted that I could not bear the thought of finding that it was a foe instead of a friend.

Throwing the cape back from my head, and seizing my gun, which was lying on the ground, I started toward the fire.

It was not far away, and in a very short time I had nearly traversed the distance between it and me.

When I was nearly upon it, I peered through the gloom to see if I could detect the color of the stranger, or strangers, whom I was approaching. To my surprise, not a soul could be seen. The fire was the only sign of human presence.

I went nearer. The fire was burning brightly, but still the author of it was not visible.

Then I imprudently walked forward, and stood by the cheerful, crackling blaze, looking about with the expectation of seeing some person step out from the surrounding gloom and confront me.

I would not have acted so rashly but for my ignorance of life in the Far West.

Neither would I have been surprised at finding the fire deserted, when I had approached it so incautiously.

As it was, I was really astonished, and wondered how these combustibles could be gathered together and burning so nicely when nobody was near. But there must be somebody near. The fire was kindled by human hands, and the man or men, as the case might be, could not be far away.

On the ground lay a bone that seemed to have been very recently cleaned. That, in itself, told that somebody was near.

I cast piercing glances all round, and waited anxiously for some one to come forth and confront me.

No one appeared, and I began to grow alarmed. What if I prove to be in the camp of enemies? Indians might be lying around under cover of darkness, watching me with greedy eyes, and determined to make me pay dearly for my bold intrusion; having found out that a white man was coming, and hidden before my arrival.

Was it so? I thought it was, for surely a "pale-face" would not keep himself concealed from one of his own color.

"Wagh!"

It was a low, guttural voice, resembling the distant rumbling of thunder, that gave utterance to this strange exclamation.

I started and turned quickly around, cocking my gun as I did so, with the thought that I was about to find use for it. I expected to find a big, fierce-looking Indian behind me, standing in readiness to strike me down.

But not so. What was my surprise and delight to find that, instead of an Indian, it was a white man!

Yes, such it was. I stood before a tall, heavily-built man, a hunter and trapper, as was evident from his dress and other proofs.

His height was about six feet, and he was leaning on a rifle almost as long as himself. He was about forty-five years of age, as I judged, though it would be almost impossible to arrive at any definite conclusion on that point, in looking on his face. The latter was weather-beaten and sun-bronzed, telling of a long life in the open air.

The features, however, were nearly regular, giving me the impression that he was remarkably good looking in his youth. His nose was slightly aquiline, and the nostrils were delicately curved. His eyes were very black, and I observed that there was a look of deep melancholy in their inky depths. Besides this, I saw deep furrows on his brow that had not been stamped there by age, and it struck me that he was no stranger to sorrow.

The lower part of his face was enveloped in a bushy grizzly beard.

I stood for a minute, after turning upon him so quickly, surveying him from head to foot, while he, at the same time, was looking at me as closely.

I had heard much of these old hunters, and this was undoubtedly one of them. He looked as if he had a kind heart, and I believed that I would find in him a friend. The builder of the fire had now made his appearance in the person of a white hunter, and my troubles seemed to be drawing to a close.

Down went the gun from my shoulder, and I extended my hand, exclaiming:

"Why, sir, how are you? I am indeed pleased to meet you under the circumstances."

Contrary to my expectations, he seemed not in the least desirous of being friendly. He maintained a strict silence, and looked steadily at me without moving, instead of accepting the proffered hand and returning my salutation, as I thought he should do.

Somewhat nettled by this cool refusal, I drew myself proudly up to my full height, and stood as motionless as he, returning his scrutinizing gaze with as much coolness.

Instantly the features relaxed; the corners of his bearded mouth twitched upward in a smile that didn't exactly please me, and there was a mischievous twinkle in his eyes which annoyed me, and caused my face to flush with indignation.

"Sir," I began; but just at the same time he burst forth:

"Say, stranger!"

I was startled by the deep, rumbling voice, and his eyes fairly sparkled as he noticed it.

"Well?" I stammered.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with a coarse laugh.

"Nothing, sir—nothing at all," I replied, quite calmly. I began to hate the man.

"Say, stranger," he resumed, "what are ye sneakin' around a settler's camp at this time o' night fur?"

"Sneaking!" I repeated, indignantly. "Why do you say that? I am sure I came up boldly enough, and without evil intentions."

"Yas, I should say ye did come bold enough," said he, with a meaning look.

I turned upon him a glance of inquiry
"Why did ye come hyar?" he asked.

"I came with the hope of finding a friend," I promptly answered.

He arched his eyebrows.

"D'l, hey? Are ye in want o' friends?" and I noticed a change in his voice.

"Yes, sir; I certainly am in need of a friend just now—one experienced in the life you seem to be leading."

"Got yerself in a fix?"

"I am lost."

"Lost, are ye?"

"I am, in deed; and I wish to meet with somebody who would be kind enough to extend to me a helping hand. I'm afraid, however, that such a person is not to be found."

There may have been a slight touch of sarcasm in this last remark of mine, but if so, he to whom it was addressed either failed to observe it, or chose to disregard it.

"What might be yer handle, stranger?"

"Do you mean my name?"

"Reckon I duz."

"It is Robert Graham."

"Exactly—purty good handle. Whar d'ye hail from, stranger?"

"The city of New York."

The hunter indulged in a low whistle, and opened his eyes in surprise.

"The deuce now, is that so, stranger? You ain't a New York chap, be ye? Blow me ef ye ain't quite a curiosity. 'Tain't often I see a white man out in these parts, an' I never did see one afore that hailed from a p'int so far away to'r'd tha risin' sun. I knowed ye come from the States, though, when I first see'd ye. What ye after out this way?"

"Nothing in particular. A desire to see the plains, and ~~material forness in travel~~ induced me to come."

"Ye was goin' to Californy, hey?"

"I started for that place, but not to seek a fortune, I assure you."

"How did ye git lost?" was the next question of the inquisitive hunter.

I then related to him how Harry and I had decided to cross the plains; had joined the emigrant-train *en route* for California; and how I had so carelessly wandered away from the camp, so far that I could not find my way back.

"Wal, ye're an awful queer 'un," chuckled my hearer, when I had finished.

"Sir!" I cried, half angrily.

"Thar, youngster, don't git mad 'cause I sed that. It's tha way we rough cusses talk out in this part o' the kentry, an' ye oughtn't ter fly off the handle ef I'm not quite so perlite as you sellers from the States."

The words of the hunter caused me to feel ashamed of my haste in taking offense, and made me think that I had judged him wrongly. I was about to excuse myself, when he spoke again:

"So you're lost, an' in need o' somebody to lead ye out o' the diffikilty?"

"That is the trouble, sir."

"Then, youngster, jist consider old Dave Delmer the pusson ye're lookin' fur. Dave Delmer's my handle, youngster."

"Do you mean that you will be my friend?" I asked, with a throb of joy.

"Sartinly. I'll do all I kin fur ye, an' ye needn't think yerself lost while yer with me. Leastwise, ye'll not die o' starvation."

Now I was positive that I had wronged the old fellow. I had thought him an unfeeling, hard-hearted man, but here he had proved the very opposite. I had begun to hate him, but no longer did I harbor such feelings in my breast. I could have embraced him!

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Delmer—" I began, but was interrupted with:

"Now, see hyar, Graham, ef ye go to talkin' that a-way I'm blowed ef I don't walk right off an' leave ye to yer fate. Keep yer thanks fur some other time; I don't want 'em."

I laughed aloud, for I was in a very good humor now, and my new friend accepted the hand I extended to him, and shook it warmly.

CHAPTER III.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IMMEDIATELY old Dave Delmer and I were on the best of terms.

Sitting by the cheerful fire, we talked as familiarly to each other as if we had long been friends, he asking me innumerable questions concerning the city of my birth, and the customs of the people there, and I learning much from him about wild life on the prairies and mountains, and the nature and customs of the savage red-men, who at that time infested that part of the land. All the while he was smoking a little black pipe, an article indispensable to hunters, and I was satisfying my appetite by eating my fill of buffalo-hump, broiled by the fire.

An intimacy soon sprung up between us, and we were warm friends. As we talked, I liked him more and more, and I had reason to believe that he also took a liking to me, though why it was so I will not pretend to say. I became accustomed to his rough style of speaking, and when he chose to call me a "green 'un," I took it good-naturedly, knowing that he told the truth.

There was something very strange about Dave. Once or twice, during our conversation, he ceased smoking, and looking upward, sat for some time as if in deep meditation. Then I saw, or fancied I saw, a sad, pitiful look in his eyes; but once a fierce flush took its place, and a dark cloud swept over his face, leading me to believe that a memory of the past both grieved and enraged him.

At such times I would speak to him repeatedly before I could succeed in rousing him from his reverie. I thought there must have been an extremely sad event in his life-history.

"Say, boy, di lu't ye say yer name wur Graham?" inquired the hunter, after a fit of musing.

"Yes--Robert Graham," I answered.

He said no more just then, but puffed his pipe in silence for awhile, leaving me to wonder if he had a purpose in making that inquiry, other than a mere wish to know my name. I scrutinized his countenance, but it betrayed nothing.

I broke the silence.

"Delmer?"

"Hyar," drawled the rumbling voice of the trapper, between two whiffs of his pipe.

"Whither are you bound?"

"Wal, young feller, that 'ud be ruther hard to tell," was the hesitating reply. "I'm not bound fur any partic'lar place. I used to trap up in Oregon, but I've quit that now, 'cause I've got a big job afore me that's got to be done afore any thing else is done."

A cloud of smoke, ascending from the speaker's mouth, concealed his face as he made this last remark, and thus prevented me from seeing the expression of his countenance. When the smoke cleared away the tanned face was as calm as before.

"Can you do any thing for me?" I asked.

"Do any thing fur ye?" he echoed, looking as if he failed to comprehend the meaning of my words. "What d'ye mean by that?"

"I mean that I wish to know whether or not you can guide me to a fort, or some other place where I can find friends. I wish to either return to the East, or get upon the right road to California."

"Yer well enough off while yer with Dave Delmer," said that singular individual.

"I know I am, but I have no reference to that. I am already under lasting obligations to you, but I can not remain here and allow my friends, relatives, to mourn me as dead."

"Wal, I'll tell ye what, ~~dog~~," said the trapper, after a short pause; "I'm trampin' due north-west now, an' if ye're a mind to tramp with me fur a few days, ye may be able to take up yer heels an' go on to the mines, what yer claim is."

"How?"

"Jest in this way. By goin' in that d'rection we'll sooner or later strike the Oregon trail, an' when we reach it, we'll not leave it till a caravan passes that way *en route* fur the place

yer bound far. We won't hav to wait long, either, arter strikin' the trail, 'cause the yaller fever is sendin' everybody westward, an' the prairie's alive with emigrants, all crazy to git thar pinchers on the nuggets."

"An excellent plan," I said, delighted with the prospect of meeting Harry again before long. "An excellent plan, Delmer, and I shall never be able to repay you for your kindness."

Dave burst into a hearty laugh when I said this, so suddenly as to startle me.

"Why, what are you laughing at?" I exclaimed.

"Ye're the awfalest feller I ever did see," he laughed. "Jest to think, I can't say a word 'thout ye put in 'bout kindness, an' say ye're much obleegeed, an' all that sort o' thing. Can't ye take things calmly? Ye're absolutely awful!"

I, too, laughed now, much amused by the characteristic speech of the trapper.

Thus we passed away the time in pleasant conversation, till at length my companion, knocking the ashes from his pipe, said:

"Come, ~~Graham~~, let's stretch ourselves out on the ground hyar, an' try to ketch a little sleep. Reckon the wolves won't trouble us. If they come near I'll be sure to wake up afore they begin to chaw us up."

With this, he scattered the fire about so that it could not have been seen at a short distance away, and then stretched his gigantic form on the grass, seeking rest and sleep.

I followed his example, lying close to him, and shuddering as the prolonged, quavering howl of the distant mountain wolf was borne to my ear. I felt almost like a child beside this hardy trapper, and I felt that I need have no fear as long as he was with me and able to protect me.

For a time I lay awake, reviewing the recently past events in my mind, and congratulating myself on my good fortune in finding help so soon, while the low, regular breathing of Dave Delmer told me that he was asleep. Then my thoughts changed to him, and I began to wonder why it was that he fell into such fits of musing at times, and seemed so troubled. I continued to think of him till I had aroused my curiosity to hear the history of his life.

My reflections drifted from one thing to another, till at last a drowsiness came over me, and I sunk gradually into the arms of Morpheus.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE EQUESTRIAN

WHEN I awoke it was still dark; the stars were still shining in the cloudless sky, and the dismal chorus of the wolves could still be heard on every side; but a faint, gray glimmer in the east told that morning was near.

Unaccustomed to sleeping in the open air, and with nothing but grass between me and the ground, it is not strange that my slumbers were light and of short duration. I rose to a sitting posture to seek the rest I could not obtain by lying down, and to prepare myself for another attempt to sleep.

As I did so, I was much surprised to find that Dave Delmer was also awake. He was crouching down by the fire, which had been replenished, and was as silent as a dead man, while his glittering orbs seemed fastened on some object far away in the darkness!

His head was bent forward, too, as if he were listening intently for something.

"Why, what's the matter, Dave?" I whispered, with a fear at my heart that enemies were near.

He moved not, made no reply, nor did he seem to hear.

"What's the matter, Dave?" I repeated, speaking louder than before.

He heard me now, and looked around.

"What are you awake fur?" he demanded.

"Because I couldn't sleep," I replied, laughing. "But tell me, Delmer, is there any thing the matter?"

"Matter? What makes ye think so?"

"Why, you appeared to be so intent on watching something that you failed to hear me when first I spoke."

"I wur not watchin' any thing."

"**You were not?**"

"Nary time—I wur list'nin' to sumthin'."

"Listening? Did you hear any thing?"

"Reckon I did, an' I do yet. Don't you hear sumthin', Graham?"

"Nothing, save those hideous howls, that have filled the air since nightfall."

Dave grinned.

"Listen ag'in," Le said, with a meaning look, "an' I ruther guess ye'll hear sumthin' else—sumthin' like the *gallopin' of a hoss!*"

"What! do you think the Indians are coming?" I ejaculated.

"I think somebody's a-comin'," quietly returned the hunter, "but that ain't more'n one pusson."

I now placed my ear close to the ground, and listened. I heard a distant sound, like the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and I knew that some kind of an animal was coursing over the prairie, far away from our encampment.

"D'yé hear it now?"

"Yes, I hear it very plainly now," I asserted, rising to my feet; "but do you think it is more than a wild horse?"

"Sartin I duz. I think that hoss has a rider—in fact, I'd bet my skulp on't."

"Ought not the fire to be extinguished?" I suggested, hesitatingly.

"Are ye afriad?" asked the trapper, with a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

"Afraid? no, I am not!" I quickly cried, my face flushing up with indignation. "I assure you I didn't make the suggestion because I was anxious about my own safety, but for the reason that I thought to extinguish the fire would be an act of prudence, when the number of our enemies can not be determined."

The trapper indulged in a quiet laugh.

"Yer powerful quick-tempered, youngster."

"I have no desire to be called a coward," I said, rather tartly.

"Wal, ye must larn to take a joke a leetle easier'n that. I jest axed ye if ye wur afriad, 'cause I didn't know. Ye may be pluck to the backbone fur all I know, as I've hed no chance ter find out yit."

"Are you sure there is but one Lorsemian?" I asked, only too willing to change the subject.

"In course I are. I knowed thar's only one when I fust heerd the sound, an' I ain't goin' to put out the fire fur a single man, even ef he be an Injun. Ef he p'esumes to come this way, we'll deprive him of his wind. I like to fight Injuns anyhow. That's part o' my occupation, an' I wouldn't kee'r a tinker's sneeze ef every mother's son on 'em was shuffled off to eternal misery!"

A fierce, dark scowl distorted his features, as this last sentence fell from his mouth.

"The horse is traveling in this direction?" I said, half interrogatively, as the faint clatter came more distinctly to my ear.

Dave stood still for a minute, as if listening, and then shook his head.

"No, he's not comin' to'rd us. I think he's got his nose p'inted westward."

"And do you think he carries an Indian?"

"Yes, more likely a Injun than a white."

"Perhaps it is not a horse."

"Not a horse! What in the name o' the old scratch d'ye reckon it is then?"

"It may be a buffalo."

"He! he! Nary buffler."

"A deer then?"

"No, not a deer e'ther. What 'ud a deer or buffler be dashin' so madly over the prairie at this time o' night far?"

"Pursued by wolves, probably."

"Wal, that mought be, but it ain't so, 'cause ef wolves war arter an animal o' that description they wouldn't keep it a secret."

"What mean you?"

"I mean that they'd make sich an infarnal noise that ye'd think all Pandemonium had broke loose."

"Well, I suppose it must be a horse then," I said, laughing.

"I know it is," firmly rejoined the trapper. "S'pose I can't tell by the hoof-strokes? A buffler's too clumsy to run that a-way, an' a deer wouldn't make that kind of a noise. You see, that's a boss an' no mistake."

We both relapsed into silence now, and stood listening to the sound, till all of a sudden it ceased.

"There, he has passed beyond hearing," said I, drawing a long breath.

Dave said nothing, but still stood in silence.

"Surely you don't hear it yet?" I added, thinking he must have remarkably good ears, if he could still detect the sound that I had ceased to hear.

"No; the cuss has stopped," he replied quietly, retaining his position.

"Stopped?"

"Yes, to be sure. He's not gone out o' ear-shot, no such a thing. He's halted as sure as ye live, an' I'll stake a beaver-skin ag'in' a claw o' pig-tail that he's got his peepers on this dre."

"You don't think he sees our fire?"

"I surely do. Ihev an idee that he's espied this light an halted to gaze on it a minnit. It must look mighty small from whar he is, but still he's kotted sight on't, an' that's why he's reined in his beast. Thar! d'ye hear that? He's started ag'in."

I inclined my head, and listened. The noise occasioned by the galloping horse was indeed resumed; the dull tramping of the hoofs was borne very distinctly to our ears by the still night air.

"Yes," I said, "the nocturnal rider is on the move again. I hope he is satisfied."

"Wal, he's not satisfied, not by a long shot," said Dave, shaking his head,

"How do you know?"

"Cause he is comin' this a-way jest as hard as he kin tear!"

A short silence followed. The sound was, as Dave said, growing louder and nearer.

The horseman, whoever he should prove to be, was evidently approaching swiftly and fearlessly, probably to satisfy his curiosity in regard to our fire. If an Indian, he would certainly find enemies lying in wait for him, and Dave swore that if he had a red skin he should not escape with his life.

But it might be a white man, one who was in trouble and needed assistance, and was coming to us with the hope of finding it—a hunter, possibly, pursued by Indians. If such was the case, he was approaching two friends who were ready and willing to lend him all the assistance that lay in their power.

"Graham," said Dave, "we don't want ter stand hyar. Let's step back here in the darkness, an' wait fur that chap to come up."

After replenishing the fire we moved back a few paces, and lying down on the grass, so that we could not have been seen at the distance of six feet, we waited patiently for the stranger's arrival.

"You'd better not shoot," advised the trapper. "I'll do all the shootin' thar is to do, an' that won't be much, I reckon."

"As to that," I responded, "you are perfectly welcome to do all the shooting that is necessary to be done. I never killed a fellow-creature, and I hope I may never be compelled to do so."

"Didn't you never kill nobody?"

"Never."

"An' never want to kill a red-skin?"

"To be sure I do not."

"Wal, I'll bet ye wouldn't say that ef the brutes had done ye as much harm as they hev me."

"How did they harm you?" I ventured to inquire.

"Can't tell ye now," was the low, husky reply. "It's sunkthin' ye need never know."

I said no more on that subject, seeing that it was a very painful one to him, and we lay for several moments in silence, turning our thoughts to the approaching stranger.

Louder and louder grew the dull pounding of hoofs on the ground, as nearer and nearer came the invisible horseman, and he seems to be but a short distance away.

The speed of the animal was slackened considerably now, but still he progressed at a moderate gallop. Crouching close to the ground, Dave and I waited in silence for him to make his appearance. Not long were we kept waiting.

Soon something dark, resembling in shape the head and

shoulders of a man, loomed up between us and the distant sky, rising up and down with every leap of the horse that carried him.

A few more springs and the horse landed almost in the fire, where he was reined in with such a jerk that he was pitched back on his haunches.

He was a beautiful animal—a powerful coal-black steed, with long, clean limbs, finely-shaped body and proudly-arched neck, luxuriant mane, and a tail that swept the ground. But I took but a momentary look at him, for his rider was an object of more interest, and I gave him my attention.

It was not an Indian, but a white man!

Neither of us had expected this, but we saw at a glance that it was really the case, as his face was plain to be seen now in the flickering light.

Yes, he was white, but still he was unlike in appearance the common class of hunters.

He was tall and commanding, and sat in his saddle with the grace and dignity that characterize well-trained horsemen. In appearance he was as bold as a lion. His eyes were black as night; a fierce-looking mustache of the same color, gracefully twisted at the ends, adorned his upper lip; the glossy hair, falling in wavy masses from beneath the low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat, brushed his shoulders at every movement of the stately head.

His hunting-frock was of black velvet, tastefully embroidered at the breast, and a heavy silken fringe bordering the cape and skirt. It was drawn in about the waist by a wide scarlet belt, which supported a long hunting-knife and an ugly-looking bowie.

Besides these necessities he carried a fine-looking rifle suspended across his back, the silver mountings of which flashed in the light of the fire.

He wore neat-fitting, high-topped boots, the toes resting lightly and easily in the stirrups, and the heels supporting large brass spurs. Very little of his breeches was visible, but what I saw of them was sufficient to convince me that they were made of soft, well-dressed deer-skin, fitting closely to his legs.

Altogether he was such a looking person as one would not

expect to meet in such a place, and one that would claim a fellow's attention at any place.

My opinion was that he was a man unaccustomed to a hunter's life, and lost on the prairie, like myself.

Scarce a minute after he had reined in his steed, I was startled by Dave Delmer springing suddenly to his feet.

"*Kirke D'vereaux!*" he shouted, hoarsely, and the next instant the loud explosion of his rifle, held with unsteady hands, rent the air!

He had fired upon the stranger!

The latter gave a quick, sharp yell, not of pain, for the ball had not sped true to its aim, but a yell of terror and amazement, at the sudden appearance of the trapper.

The black steed tossed his head back with affright, and reared up, threatening to dislodge his rider, whose eyes glared wildly and seemed ready to start from their sockets.

But, he managed to keep his seat, and almost instantly after the trapper had discharged his gun, he plunged the cruel spurs into the steaming sides of the frightened horse, at the same time crying, wildly:

"Away, Luke, away!"

His voice was deep and dismal.

With a snort of pain the tired animal gave one long leap, and then darted away like a shot, with his master unharmed, and was quickly lost to view.

"Cusses on him!" fairly screamed the voice of Dave Delmer, and before I had recovered from my bewilderment, he, too, bounded away with incredible speed, following in the tracks of the retreating horseman.

A dozen long, agile springs—he had passed the fire, and was swallowed up in the darkness.

I was left alone. I rose to my feet, but not with the intention of following Dave. I stepped forward and took my stand by the fire to await his return, which I thought would take place very soon, knowing the folly of pursuing on foot a well-mounted man.

Who was the horseman? and why had his coming so enraged the trapper and caused him to act so mysteriously?

Did Dave know him? He surely did, else, why should he act so?

Besides, I remembered now that on jumping up he had called him by name. He had called him *Kirke Davereaux*.

The name was a strange one to me, which certainly was nothing singular, as I could not be expected to be acquainted with the names of people living in this region.

But if Dave knew him I was positive now; and it was quite evident that they were not on the best of terms. Dave's actions, had he not discharged his gun, would have convinced me on that point.

Possibly Davereaux was an old enemy of Lis, who had deeply wrung him in bygone days. Davereaux might be a villain, who, in their early life, had in some cruel manner blasted the early happiness of Delmer; hence those sad spells that sometimes came over the hunter, which I had noticed in the short time that I had passed in his company.

Leastwise, I knew they were bitter enemies from what had just occurred.

It was plain, too, that the stranger saw much to be feared from the hunter, and, according to my conclusions, drawn from what I had heard and witnessed, he was endeavoring to elude a punishment that he richly deserved.

My reflections were interfered with by the sharp report of a rifle out on the prairie.

It came from the direction that the intruder and his infuriated partner had taken, and I rightly conjectured that Dave had loaded and discharged his piece again.

All was still after the report, and I wondered if Dave really had slain the singular individual, since the sound of the horse's hoofs no longer reached my ear.

I walked to and fro, waiting for him to return, half fearing that it was he, and not his enemy, who was shot.

But I was wrong. Several minutes of painful suspense, and then I hear footsteps approaching. Looking up I saw Dave coming toward me, leisurely loading his gun as he walked, and moving with slow, lagging steps, as if he was not exactly willing to give up the chase, and allow the man to escape.

His face wore a gloomy, disappointed look.

"Did you kill him?" I ventured, as he finished loading his rifle, and stopped by the fire.

"No," he growled, knitting his brows, and looking down

at the glowing embers. "The brute got away with a hul' skin, but he wouldn't ef I hadn't been so powerful mad that I couldn't shoot straight. Never mind; my vengeance 'll overtake him yit, jest as sure as thar's a sun that shines over us both!"

These last words were hissed out through his hard-set teeth, and his blazing orbs wore a look of fierce determination.

"Why do you hate him so, may I ask?" I continued, after a minute's pause.

"The Lord knows I've good cause to hate him, but I can't tell what it is now," said he, still gazing down on the smoldering fire at his feet.

"What is his name, and does he live out here?" I asked, though I had already heard the name of the horseman.

"His handle are Kirke Davreaux, an' he makes his home in these parts. That's all I kin tell ye now. Maybe some time I'll tell ye more."

Seeing that he disliked to be questioned on the subject, and that he preferred to be left to his gloomy thoughts, I obliged him by holding my tongue. I had certainly fallen in with a very singular man, but notwithstanding his strange actions at times, I knew that he was the possessor of a big, honest heart, and was as willing to befriend a stranger as he was to punish a foe.

That some sad misfortune had befallen him, I doubted not, and that Kirke Davreaux was at the bottom of it, I had already decided in my mind.

What it was I had not the slightest suspicion, but that it was no trifling affair I could tell by what had occurred in my view.

By this time the heavy gloom that had hung over the land was gradually dispersing, the stars were dying out, and in the east the long rays of the rising sun were reaching up athwart the heavens, telling us that our time for slumber had expired.

After partaking to our satisfaction of the fresh buffalo-meat which Dave carried, we set out on our long journey, just as the sun cast a flood of genial light over the plains.

CHAPTER V.

A QUINTETTE OF INTREETERS.

OUR route lay a little north of west.

Mile after mile we traveled, the sun throwing his cheerful warmth upon us from his azure throne, rendering the temperature as pleasant as we could desire. I would much rather have had my horse under me, but as that was not possible I tried to be contented. I had no right to complain after meeting with such good luck, and for this, I was willing to travel on foot day after day, till we should strike the Oregon trail.

My companion seemed as well contented as if he was riding, walking with perfect ease, and with such long, rapid strides, that it was with difficulty I kept pace with him. This was apparently his usual mode of roaming the prairies over.

Dave was not in a good humor. Several times I attempted to open a conversation with him, but as many times I received such a short, crusty reply, that I deemed it best to leave him to his reflections.

He strode on in silence, occasionally frowning, grinding his teeth, and muttering incoherently to himself. It was plain that the night adventure had made a deep impression on his mind, and awakened bitter memories, for once I heard him speak, in a low tone to himself, the name of the mysterious horseman, with teeth compressed and eyes flashing fire, eloquent with fierce hatred and determination.

Again I saw him looking steadily at me with an expression I could not define.

This I could not account for. Why he should gaze so strangely at me was beyond my comprehension.

He could not know me. I was sure I had never seen him till I encountered him here on this vast western plain, and if he saw in my face a resemblance to any acquaintance of his, I thought it must be by mere chance.

Even his name was one that I had never heard before to my recollection.

All day we walked steadily onward, stopping only long enough to eat the remainder of the buffalo-hump. Nothing worthy of record occurred during the day, except that late in the afternoon an antelope fell a victim to Dave Delmar's rifle, the choicest portions of which we secured.

When night came on we halted, and after a hearty meal laid down to rest.

I slept much better than on the preceding night, and when morning came I arose much refreshed and ready to resume our journey.

Dave was himself again now, and the time passed much more pleasantly than on the day before.

Noon came, and found us sitting by a small fire, doing justice to a portion of the antelope, which was nicely prepared by the skillful hands of my companion. We were tired, and for some time after finishing our meal we sat there conversing, Dave being in a talkative mood now.

To the west of us the rugged peaks of the Rocky Mountains were towering up toward the blue sky; while to the east lay the level prairie over which we had traveled.

We were encamped near a small grove of cottonwood trees, through which ran a broad and deep river, glistening under the scorching rays of the midday sun.

"Graham!" suddenly burst forth the trapper.

"Well?" I returned, looking at him in surprise, the tone of his voice assuring me that something terrible was coming.

His right hand was raised to his forehead, shading his eyes, while the latter were fastened with a piercing gaze on the thick grove of cottonwoods, as though something there, unobserved till now, had attracted his attention.

Noting the uneasy expression of his countenance, I knew something was wrong, and looked in the same direction to learn what it was. But look as searchingly as I would, nothing was presented to view; that is, nothing that would be likely to excite my suspicions. Only the scrubby trees were visible to my eye.

I looked again at Dave, to see if he was really gazing at that point. A single glance convinced me that I was not mistaken.

"By thunder, Graham!" he blurted out again, and then he

was silent once more, while he seemed to forget every thing, save that which was holding his attention.

"Well, what is it?" I asked, growing impatient at the delay.

"Blow me, ef we ain't camped right in a nest o' red-skins!" he answered, turning toward me.

"Red-skins!" I ejaculated; "where are they? I see none."

"There, right over yender in that patch o' timber!" was the slow reply.

Again I looked closely at the spot indicated, but as before was unable to detect a single thing that would tell of an Indian's presence.

"Surely, you mistake," said I; "you must be deceived, Dave."

"No, sir!" firmly responded Dave. "Reckon I've been long enough 'mong the Injuns to learn a thing or two. My peepers hev never deceived me yit, an' I know they don't now. The pesky brutes is in that timber, though how many they number I can't say."

"Did you see them?"

"No."

"You saw their fire, I presume."

"No."

"Did you not? Then it must have been the smoke of their fire that you saw."

"Wrong ag'in."

"The fence! How know you, then, that the savages are concealed there?"

"I seed a hoss," was the response.

"A horse?"

"Yes—a mustang. He's kinder shifted his position, an' I didn't see him now, but I am sure I did see him. I had to look a good while afore I could decide that it was a hoss, but just as he moved I was satisfied."

"But surely, Dave," said I, "that is no proof that enemies are near."

"Why ain't it?"

"Because it could as well be the property of friends."

"Friends!" laughed the trapper. "That mought be, but yo see, young man, ye must know that in this kentry every-

body, red or white, is to be looked upon as enemies till ye learn that they are not. Besides, ef any friendly pussons are thar, I shouldn't think they'd keep tharselves under kiver."

Seeing that the trapper was in the right, as usual, and that I was only exposing my "greenness," I made no more suggestions.

I wondered at Dave's coolness while he declared that Indians were so near, and that weakened my faith in his statement. He spoke of the fiercee wretches with as much apparent unconcern, as though nothing was to be feared from them.

Why he should appear so free from anxiety was strange, I thought, while our lives were in such imminent danger.

But I would not have wondered had I known then what I afterward learned, that old hunters, as a general thing, are most composed when in the greatest danger.

"In the name of heaven, Dave, what shall we do?" I cried, anxiously.

"Do nothin'," was the reply.

"Can not we save our lives by running?"

"Course not—they're mounted."

"Then we must remain here and fall into their hands?"

"We must remain hyar an' fight!" said Dave, with strong emphasis.

"Fight!" I echoed; "what can we do against a number of those bloodthirsty rascals?"

"Why, bless yer soul, we kin send some on 'em to the happy hunting-grounds."

"True, but will that avail us any thing?"

"Maybe so—maybe not. 'Cause ye sees we don't know how many we hav to contend with. Thar may be twenty, an' thar may be only three or four, or half-a-dozen. Ef the latter, we'll polish 'em all off; ef the former, we neel expect no quarter. Ef thar's a score on 'em, we must fight all the time, an' not go under till we wipe out our number of foes."

To say that I was cool just then, would, I fear, be going too far. My companion afterward declared that I turned pale, but I hope the reader will not believe that, for it is very embarrassing to be called timid.

But even that pught to be excusable when it is remembered that I never encountered an Indian as an enemy, had heard so much of the hellish manner in which they put their foes to death, and now expected an attack from them in overwhelming numbers. No wonder a slight feeling of fear began to steal over me, as I read in Dave Delmer's face that we were in a bad predicament, and that death was almost certain if the enemy outnumbered us three to one.

Had I been alone it would have much more than slightly frightened me, and then I realized how fortunate I was in finding such a friend as the daring trapper.

However, I resolved to show Dave that I was not a coward, and with as much coolness as I could command I looked to the priming of my rifle, saying:

"Well, if it must be so, let them come, and we'll meet them half-way."

"That's the talk, young man," said Dave, approvingly, "an' if ye'll stand by me that may be a chance o' retainin' our skulps— Jerusalem!"

No wonder he gave utterance to this last exclamation. As he did so he pointed toward the river.

Looking in that direction, I saw five half-naked Indians bounding toward us at the top of their speed!

Fortunately, they were not mounted, thinking, probably, that horses would not be necessary in catching us, and their number was much less han we had dared to expect.

When they saw that they were observed, they gave vent to an ear-splitting war-whoop, so loud, so terrible, so fierce as to startle me, and cause me to involuntarily clutch the arm of my lion-hearted companion.

"Stand firm, boy—stand firm," came the low, calm voice of Delmer, as the hideous blood-curdling cries were continued, while the five painted demons, brandishing their long, gleaming lances over their crested heads, came bounding on with unabated speed.

"Now, boy," continued the trapper, speaking rapidly, "git yer si. ever ready, an' we'll give two of them their last sickness. Then thar'll only be three left, an' we kin run like blazes till we load up, an' then we kin knock two more on 'em under, leavin' only one to manage."

We both raised our guns to our shoulders, and aimed them at the approaching savages.

Delmer gave the command. Simultaneously we pressed the triggers; our rifles were discharged with a single report.

A piercing, unearthly shriek was borne to our ears, and as the cloud of smoke, that obstructed our view, was wafted away, we saw that only one of the Indians was shot. My bullet had failed to hit the mark!

"Ye missed by thunder!" exclaimed the hunter, looking at the prostrate fellow whose life he had taken.

"Yes, curses on the luck!" I cried, angry at myself for being so awkward.

"No use cryin' over spilt milk," said the hunter, cheerfully. "Come, we must run like thunder now, an' load up as we run. Make good use o' them pegs o' your'n, or they'll ketch ye afore ye kin ram down the powder."

The Indians were almost upon us now, yelling more furiously since the death of their comrade than before, and with lances poised in readiness to run us through.

We turned our backs upon them, and started away as swiftly as we could run.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A FIX.

SOMEHOW, Dave and I became separated while running, and as a matter of course the Indians also separated, two of them hotly pursuing the old hunter, and the other two almost flying along directly in my tracks, and so close to me that they might at any moment have run their lances through my body.

But this, it seemed, they did not wish to do. Their intention was, I thought, to take me captive; failing in that, they would take my life.

One or the other seemed certain, and I preferred immediate death to captivity, when I thought what a horrible fate would surely be mine if I was taken as a prisoner to the home of the Indians.

I entirely forgot Dave, knowing that he was much more capable of taking care of himself than I, thinking only of myself and the danger in which I was placed.

I endeavored to ride my gun in my hand flight, but failed. To load it while running I tried to do so by unsawing the gun with an experienced hunter, like Dave, I knew it would be difficult. To accomplish it I would have to slacken my speed considerably, and to do that would be to place myself in the hands of the savages.

So, without a second trial, I gave it up, and concluded to take the chances of saving my life by flight.

The Indians were both fleet of foot, and I had to strain every muscle to keep out of their reach. Even then I could not increase the distance between them and me. They hallooed their yelling now, and were perfectly silent as the excitement of the chase increased.

A thought struck me—a thought that revived the last spark of hope which was dying out within my breast.

It occurred to me that if I could but reach the grove of cottonwoods, which had been the concealment of the Indians, I could better defend myself than on the open prairie.

I began to act upon the thought by slightly changing my course so as to make a wide circuit and take the back-track for the woods. The Indians were apparently ignorant of the object I had in view, for, had they divined my intention, they would, I thought, have taken measures to prevent me from carrying it out.

As it was, they kept close in the rear, and made no attempt to keep me from running, while I, with difficulty managing to keep out of their hands, turned gradually toward the point I wished to reach.

No man I ever completely trembled more than did they exhibit themselves as they had the best opinion of what I was trying to do. Then they resumed their hunting cries, and went back to increase their speed.

Now my face was toward the grove, and if I could but reach that I thought it possible to elude the pursuers till my gun could be reloaded. I clenched my teeth, and with renewed vigor darted forward with such unusual speed as to astonish myself. I now saw, with delight, that I was fast

gaining ground on the fleet-footed wretches, whose fierce yells of rage served only to urge me on.

Further and further they fell in the rear, and harder and harder I tried to leave them far behind, that I might have time to get my gun in shooting order before they could lay hands upon me. Strange to say, I thought not once of the fine brace of pistols resting idly in my bosom, with which both of the Indians might have been shot. I had not had occasion to use them since they were purchased, and, consequently, had nearly forgotten that such weapons were in my possession.

It seemed as though superhuman speed was lent to my feet. My limbs naturally grew more flexible, and I felt as if I hardly touched the ground. The cries of the Indians were growing more distant, telling me that they were fast losing ground. Their shrieks now would have done justice to a half-dozen throats.

When I had arrived within a few rods of the piece of timber, I heard the sonorous voice of Dave Delmer calling to me:

"Say, you, Graham, don't go thar. That may be a hull raft on 'em in that place!"

Though evidently uttered far away, the words were distinctly intelligible to my ear. Dave was alive yet, then, and, I judged, out of danger. I had already heard the crack of his gun, and I conjectured that he had rid himself of both his adversaries, one by shooting, and the other with his knife, perhaps.

His words startled me. I had not once thought that more of the dogs might be concealed where these came from.

But it was too late now to profit by his advice. I was so near the grove that it could hardly be worse to keep straight on than to change my course, in which latter case I would in all probability be overhauled by the dusky twain behind me.

So on I went, with a new fear crushing down the spark of hope that had sprung up within me.

I reached the cottonwoods in safety, and dashed in among them without hesitation, though expecting every moment to be fired upon by some unseen foe.

I could see nobody; neither was I fired upon; but I did

see a small group of horses ere I had proceeded far, standing unguarded beneath a huge tree, to which they were hitched. To all appearance, not a soul save myself was near them, and they snorted and reared at me as I approached, as though badly frightened.

My first impulse was to mount one of these and gallop away, and I approached them for that purpose. But I found that they were fiery, half tamed mustangs, and when I attempted to get near them, their heels would fly out wickedly toward me, causing me to beat a hasty retreat.

As time was precious, I hurried on, without trying repeatedly to seize and mount one of the horses. I now moved along at a common "dog-trot," for the double purpose of resting myself and loading my gun.

I rammed down a heavy charge, primed it carefully, and cocked it preparatory to discharging it on a moment's notice. Still I paused not, but ran on at a moderate pace, while the two Indians, with unabated celerity, came dashing after me, nearing me so rapidly that I at once began to nerve myself for a fierce struggle for life.

A few steps brought me to the top of a long, gradual slope, at the base of which ran the broad and deep river, which I have spoken of before, I believe, as flowing through the grove.

On reaching this ~~site~~ I started down it, but I had taken only two steps when I stopped ~~and~~ stood stock-still.

Lying on the ground at one side of me was a short, hollow log, the hollow appearing sufficiently large to admit my body, and the sight of this was the cause of my abrupt pause. Why I should stop for that may seem strange, but no sooner had I espied it than it struck me that it might be of some ~~use~~ to me.

My first thought was, that the best thing I could do under the circumstances would be to ensconce myself in the log, as the pursuers were not now in sight.

Acting on my first impulse, I dropped down on all fours, and without second thought began to squeeze myself into the cavity.

Too late! A ringing whoop rent the air, telling me that I was discovered.

Still I crawled in, but no sooner had I reached the dark interior than I regretted the impudent step I had taken.

How could I detect my错误? The Indians, I really shoot never, if they had no firearms, could plunge their cruel spears into my body, and either kill me or force me from my killing place. Then, I should have my rifle firmly in my hand's end it was hardly likely that I would have a chance to use it in if the Indians were prudent enough to beware of the hole in front of me, as I thought they surely were, they need have no fear of me.

Should they approach in the rear, to defend myself would be utterly impossible. Should they be so rash as to approach in front, I might be enabled to knock one of them out of time, but then my weapon would be empty and the second opponent still alive.

I had but very little time to ruminate on my miserable condition, however, for the savages, being only a short distance away when they espied me crawling into the log, were soon on the spot.

They came up with loud cries of exultation, and I could not prevent a slight shudder when I thought of my helpless state. The next instant I heard a noise behind me, and a low, guttural exclamation! A cold chill stole over me then, as I conjectured what was coming next.

But almost at the same instant something darkened the hole before me. There was a savage at the other end.

I could see his face—an extremely repulsive face, all distorted, with the even rows of white teeth grinding with a horrible ghastliness, and the basilisk orbs gleaming like coals of fire in the gloom, as they looked, or tried to look, into the small, dark cavity.

This was more than I had looked for, and I thought the rash step and most ignorant of the fact that I had crawled home another hole than one of death, or could not fit my position round it impossible to shoot. That he was greatly afraid of it, I think, I suppose he was so afraid.

If he failed to see, within a very few seconds after his ugly visage appeared at the opening, that for which he was seeking, he never succeeded in so doing, for in truth I gave him no more time in which to accustom his eyes to the gloom.

My rifle was already pointing in that direction, and bracing it against my shoulder I quickly pulled the trigger.

A deafening roar followed, resembling that of a cannon, confined as it was in that close place. A dense cloud of smoke very nearly suffocated me, and prevented me from seeing what effect the shot had produced; but a sharp cry convinced me that it had proved fatal.

I have intimated that death or captivity was certain in my present condition, but what strange and unexpected things will sometimes happen!

As I have previously stated, my novel couch was lying on the side of the long slope that extended down to the river's brink. I slept at the same time near the top, and I may add that it had evidently been there but a short time. Consequently it had not as yet become firmly imbedded in the grass-covered ground, and could doubtless have been moved from its position with little difficulty.

Now, in charging my rifle, while I was dashing through the woods, I unwittingly poured into it more than twice the amount of powder usually used at one time.

As a natural consequence, when I shot the unfortunate wretch who had presumed to take a peep into my hiding-place, the report was much louder than usual, the shock greater, and the gun recoiled so that it wrenches my shoulder most unmercifully.

The effect was astonishing. The old log trembled. The violent concussion, occasioned by the shot, jarred it from its shallow bed.

It began to roll!

CHAPTER VII.

Yes, it was actually loosened, and started down the hill with the velocity of a swift-winged eagle!

I was bewildered. Not once had I thought that such a thing would happen. I was alarmed, too, but I afterward

learned that it was the means of saving my life, and had I not been so unexpectedly carried away from the spot, I believe I would not have lived to relate the adventure. But it was not the will of Him who doeth all things well, that my time should come so early in life.

It was very unpleasant, that wild ride down the long slope. My position was quite a ludicrous one, too, but I thought not of that.

The bouncing and tumbling over the rough, stony ground, would have been, in itself, sufficiently unpleasant, for it did cause several severe bruises on my head and body.

But much worse was the fact that I was compelled to perform as many revolutions as the log itself!

Such was really the case, the cavity being so small that my body almost filled it. I revolved so rapidly that I felt as if I were being turned inside out. There was a hollow, sickly feeling in my breast, my brain grew dizzy and confused, and I felt like one in a dream, hardly knowing where I was or what was taking place.

Of course, I had not the power to stop it; and even had it been possible to do so it would not have been done, as my brain was so muddled that a thought that I might do such a thing failed to present itself. So on, on it flew down the hill, bearing me swiftly to the deep river!

My breath was taken away, and I gasped wildly for air enough to sustain life a little longer. I grew so dizzy that once I thought I was rolling up the hill instead of down, and again it seemed as though I were standing on my head and spinning like a top.

On went my merciless tormentor, crashing along with increasing rapidity, striking against stones and other obstacles that lay in its path, and eliciting several grunts from me, as I lay inside with eyes closed firmly and head seeming ready to burst open.

All at once the log seemed to be launched high off the ground, and a moment later it fell with a loud splash in the river.

How glad I was that the mad race was at last terminated! My brain still whirled, however, and for some seconds I was unable to realize that I had ceased rolling and was lying quite still, half-buried in water.

My delight was great, but I could not think long of that now. There was no time to be wasted in illness even now, although I had no fear of the single Indian whose companion I had shot.

My next act was to evacuate the log, which was strictly necessary to my present welfare, as the weight of my body took more than half of the log, and the water's intrusion rendered it a difficult matter to breathe through mouth or nose without strangling.

Immediately, and without the least fear as to what might be the consequence of such an act, I crawled hastily to the opening before me. Reaching it, I hesitated not, but drew myself out of the close cell in which I had been confined, and dropped down into the cool, limpid water, so refreshing to my aching head, leaving the detested log at liberty to float where it would.

I turned my face toward the shore for the purpose of wading thither, as the water here was not deep enough to render swimming necessary.

But as I did so, a sight met my eyes that arrested my footsteps and chained me to the spot.

On the river-bank, toward which I had started, were two men closely locked in each other's arms, and struggling desperately!

One was a big, muscular Indian, the other was a white man, as I could plainly see, though who it was I had no idea.

It was not Dave Delmer. That I could tell by his dress and stature, for he was shorter and more sparingly built than Dave.

Who was it? How came he there?

These questions I could not answer to my own satisfaction I thought, however, that he must have been concealed in the wood at the same time that the savages were encamped there, for had he come from a distance he surely would have been in sight and observed by the sharp-sighted Delmer before the five redskins had burst upon us.

I had a poor chance of arriving at any conclusion as to how he came there, as my brain was not yet clear, nor who he was, as he was nearly hidden from view by his burly adver-

sary, as they struggled, and reeled, and swayed to and fro, still fastened together in the arms of each.

That it was not a friendly embrace was plain to be seen, and that it was a fight for life was equally evident.

Standing waist-deep in water, with one hand holding the gun on my shoulder, and the other tightly clenched, I was spectator of the uneven combat, forgetful, for a time, that I was in the river.

The combatants turned, and twisted, and staggered, but still they kept upon their feet, and nothing was gained by either. More than once they tottered on the very brink of the river, and were on the verge of falling in, when, caused by some sudden movement, they would reel away again and continue their tiresome labor in silence.

I predicted the result, and I hardly breathed as I waited for it with a feeling of horror and dread taking possession of me.

Sooner or later the hunter must succumb under the superior strength of his gigantic opponent, and I wondered as I noted the great difference in the size of their forms, that he had not already fallen. It was wonderful in my eye how he had thus far kept upon his feet, when such a tower of strength was striving madly to overpower him.

It soon came—that which I had predicted would come.

The muscular form of the Indian was too great for that of the smaller but more wiry form with which he had been contending, and I was not surprised when I witnessed the result. The white man was hurled heavily to the ground, and the savage victor, with a sharp cry of exultation, bent over him to obtain the much-coveted scalp.

His hand was raised aloft, and in it I could see the blade of a knife glittering in the sunlight. I struggled my shield, I could not remove my eyes from the fearful spectacle. I was powerless to aid the prostrate white man, with my rifle in a clay empty but rendered useless by the water.

Ah! for the first time since becoming parted from the wagon-train, I bethought me of the pair of pistols which I had purchased at St. Louis, and which had not been discharged since leaving that city.

Why could I not help the man with these? No sooner did

the thought flash upon me than I thrust my hand in my bosom and drew forth one of the little fire-arms, which flashed under the dazzling rays of the sun as brightly as the knife in the hand of the Indian.

I knew I could not be too quick in my movements, as the victor's hand was raised in readiness to deal the fatal blow. Not as yet, however, did he notice that I was near, he certainly had no thought that he was about to be cheated of his prey.

Taking quick aim I fired. With an unearthly scream, that rings in my ears to this day, the Indian shot up into the air, and fell dead beside his intended victim.

Well satisfied with my work, I returned the empty pistol to its proper place, and set out for the shore.

The stranger, now that the danger was past, rose slowly to his feet, looking as if nearly all his strength had deserted him.

He stood on the bank beside his late antagonist, watching me in silence as I approached, while I, thinking him a total stranger, took but little notice of him as I gradually emerged from the water. I scrambled upon the bank, and had hardly done so when a familiar voice broke upon my ear, with the only exclamation :

"Bob Graham!"

I started at hearing myself thus familiarly accosted, and glanced quickly up into the face of the man whose life I had saved.

Immediately I stammered out :

"Harry Sprague!"

I no more expected to meet him there than I expected the great luminary in the clear blue sky above us to be extinguished.

But he it was—Harry Sprague, my playmate in boyhood, my most intimate friend in manhood, my noble-hearted and ever lively comrade, my *brother*, I might almost say, for a brother could not have loved him more than I did; Harry Sprague, with whom I had started on this journey across the plains, when I had left slumbering in the camp of the emigrants when I, with my usual carelessness, wandered forth and could not find my way back, and whom I had begun to fear I would never see again.

It was hard to believe that he stood before me, even after I had scanned him from head to foot in my speechless wonder. But there could be no mistake. We had been parted for a short time only, but had I not seen him for years I could not have failed to recognize that bright, handsome face, those roguish eyes, and black, curly hair, all stamped so indelibly on my memory, and I wondered why I had not recognized him even while he was locked in the arms of the buxom savage.

All at once he broke the silence by bursting out into a fit of laughter, so loud and clear that the woods echoed and reechoed with the merry sound, and Dave, who was watching us at a short distance, must have entertained a suspicion that I had met with a simpleton.

I was aroused by the natural sound, and could not help joining in the laugh, while our hands met instinctively and we indulged in a hearty shake.

"Hello! what does all this mean?" demanded a gruff voice, and Dave Delmer came toward us, gazing curiously at Harry. "Who ye got hyar, Graham?"

"Why, this is a friend of mine," I replied.

"Friend, eh? Didn't know ye hed any friends out in this kentry."

"Well, this chap doesn't live out here. This is Harry Sprague. Don't you remember hearing me speak of him when I told you I became lost on the prairie?"

"Oh, yes," drawled the trapper. "This is that same feller is it?" he added, extending his hand with a good-natured grin, though at the same time eying Harry keenly.

Now followed question after question, put to each other by Harry and myself, both so overjoyed that we hardly knew what to say.

He said he despaired of ever seeing me again in this world, and he insisted on hearing my story then and there, all that had happened to me since leaving the wagon-train.

This I did, in as few words and as quickly as possible.

"Now," said I, "let me hear why you are here, and what you have experienced since last I saw you. How came you separated from the emigrants?"

"I will tell you," said he, clearing his throat, and looking

with an air of disgust at the corpse of the Indian I had killed, which Dave was about to tumble into the river.

"When I awoke, on the morning of your disappearance, I naturally thought you were not far away, and though I was unable to find you among the emigrants, I made no inquiries concerning your whereabouts. When we started, however, and still you failed to appear, I *did* inquire what had become of you. I knew you had not breakfasted, and there was your horse, unfed and unsaddled, just where you had left him on the preceding night when we went into camp.

"No one could tell me where you were. Two or three of the men stated that they had seen you leave the camp long before sunrise, and they supposed you had intended to take a little exercise before breakfast, or was going in quest of game. I fed your horse, hitched him behind the rear wagon, and rode at the very tail-end of the caravan myself, keeping a constant lookout for you, but you were not to be seen on the wide prairie.

"When noon came, and still you were not in sight, I was confident that you were lost, or had been seized by Indians, and I decided that I had better go in search of you at once.

"I knew it would be a hazardous, as well as an almost hopeless undertaking, for what knew I more than you about these plains? Still I knew it could be no worse for me than for you, and in spite of the exhortation of the old guide, who swore I'd 'git lost,' I galloped away across the prairie.

"The consequence was just as the guide had told me it would be. Before night I was lost, and was in as bad a condition as you.

"But I was longer lost than you. The night on which you found a friend, was spent by me in loneliness and despair. All of the next day found me on the move, riding steadily and constantly, knowing not whither I was going, breakfastless, lunchless, and supperless, hungry, weary, heart sick, and fearing that what the guide had told me, that being lost on the prairie was certain death, was only too true. When night came, however, I felt ashamed of my weakness, and shook off the despondency that had haunted me all day, with a firm resolution to keep my spirits up till death or assistance should come.

"With this resolution I slept peacefully all night, and when morning came I felt much better. About two hours ago I entered this piece of timber, and was instantly captured by five Indians, who had, as I supposed, stopped there for the purpose of enjoying their midday meal. They all had good horses, and mine was placed among them, while I became the center of attraction.

"Why they left me free, when they discovered you and your friend, I can't tell; but they really did, and didn't even leave one of their number to guard me. This seemed strange to me at the time, and I can not account for it even now, for I thought Indians were never so careless."

"Wal, they are awful keerless sometimes," put in Dave, who was now as much interested in Harry's story as I.

"Be that as it may," continued Harry, "I was left alone with hands and feet free, and I very naturally began to think of making my escape. But when I saw that the scoundrels were bent on attacking men of my own color, and only two of them at that, I thought I should be playing the part of a coward to leave you to take care of yourselves. So I waited and watched for a chance to give you a lift."

"When you, Bob, came dashing toward the woods here, with those two yelping hyenas at your heels, I was not long in recognizing you. When you ran along through the woods I was too intent on watching you to think of shooting the red-skins as they passed. I laughed till I could hardly breathe when the log rolled down the hill, with you inside, after you had killed one of the Indians, and when the remaining one followed the rolling log I followed him. On reaching the bank, after you had been dumped into the water, the rascal stopped, and the next moment he and I were amusing ourselves in a clumsy waltz. I would have been the defeated party but for your timely aid, for which I owe you my life."

"Say nothing about it," said I, only too glad that I had been able to cheat the red ruffian of his victim. "Had it not been for you he might have killed me."

"But, Dave, did you slay both of your pursuers?" I asked of the trapper.

"Yas, in course I did. Shot one an' knifed the other. T'lar both layin' out yender waitin' fur the wolves an' buzzards to

come an' swaller 'em. I was afear'd ye'd git inter a nest o' the pesky critters by comin' hyar, an' it's lucky ye di ln't. I set out arter ye, an' arrove hyar in time to see part o' the fight between the red-skin an' this young feller, an' I wur just drawin' a bead on that big skunk when you tumb'led him over."

We were all now in good spirits, especially Harry and I.

If I felt a trifle despondent before, the feeling had fled now forever away by the joy occasioned by finding my chum. Now we could journey on, and I would have no fear that I would never meet Harry again; no troublesome misgiving that he was murdered by Indians, or in some other way had met his death while far away from me.

We now set about making preparations to move on, as Dave said we had already wasted time. Dave declared that our work had been well done, that of annihilating our five enemies. He had killed three, and I two, though I was not very well pleased with my work, for I never could find amusement in shedding the blood of a human being.

There were five good horses in the grove, besides that belonging to Sprague.

The trapper and I each selected one, and left the remaining three to wonder whether they would. They took advantage of the liberty by galloping away.

"Surely, Dave," said I, "you don't intend to leave these dead bodies thus?"

"Why not? What'll we do with 'em?"

"Put them under the ground, of course, or pitch them into the river."

"Bah! leave 'em lay whar they are."

"But they'll be devoured by wild beasts."

"Don't keer a tinker's button! That's what they deserve, ev'ry mother's son on 'em. Git ready an' come along. Time's precious with me."

As we thought it would not be best to oppose the hunter, we complied.

In a few minutes we were on our way, all mounted on excellent animals, Harry Sprague having recovered the fire-arms of which his captors had relieved him. Deader and I exulting over our good luck in slaughtering more than double our number of Indians without receiving the slightest injury ourselves.

"You would have been injured, though, rather severely," laughed Harry, "if that log had been a moment behind time in starting down the slope, for the brute at the rear end was in the act of drawing back his spear, preparatory to plunging it into the log when you shot the one at the opposite end."



CHAPTER VIII.

THE OLD TRAPPER'S STORY.

WE now deviated a little from the direction in which we had hitherto traveled, bearing more to the northward, in order, as Dave informed us, to strike the Oregon trail before reaching the mountains, that we might go through the latter by way of the well-known "South Pass."

The ground, as we neared the mountains, began to grow rough and difficult to traverse, and then we turned our horses' heads almost due northward.

Delmer and Harry were apparently well pleased with each other, and as we rode along they chatted and laughed together as familiarly as though they were old cronies. My usual buoyancy of spirits had returned with the appearance of Harry, and I believe the time passed more pleasantly with Delmer than on the preceding day.

Once, when one of those quiet spells came over the trapper and his whole manner was entirely changed, as if he were tortured by the memory of some calamitous event that had darkened his life, Harry abruptly asked;

"What in the deuce is the matter, old fellow? You seem deeply depressed, as if you were the victim of some sad misfortune. You certainly won't object to telling what it is?"

I almost started, so unexpected was this. I was surprised to hear him speak thus so boldly, for it was a question I had not dared to put to the eccentric hunter. I turned quickly to see what effect the plainly-spoken words produced on the person to whom they were addressed.

A cloud, darker than the one already resting there, passed

over his brow, as he turned his flashing eyes upon his interrogator, who sat unmoved in his saddle awaiting an answer.

"Why do you wish to know?" he said, in a low tone, bending a piercing look on the calm face of the young man.

"Oh, I have no particular reason for asking," was the reply "only a natural desire to satisfy my curiosity, which is easily aroused."

"Wal," said the trapper, slowly, after a pause during which the silence was broken only by the pounding of our horses' hoofs. "Wal, young fellers"—speaking to both of us—"I reckon thar won't be any harm in tellin' you why it is that I act this a-way."

With this he rode up between us, and we walked our horses to make it more convenient for us to hear and for Dave to relate the story of his past life.

"It's an awful sad story," he began, "an' it 'll pain me to tell it, but then I kinder b'lieve it 'ud make my load of sorrow easier to bear to impart the secret to some one that'll sympathize with me in my bereavement. It tuck place jest two years ago—yas, two years ago, as I'm a sinner, and I've not seen the brute but once since that time. But I'll hav to go back a good deal furder'n that, so that you'll better understand why it wur that the dark deed of two years ago wur enacted.

"When I wur a youngster, 'bout the age of you chaps, my home wur in St. Louis. Like most all other youths of that age, when they feel that they are men, an' are able to take keer of not only themselves, but a purty female an' some children likewise, I began to think seriously of committin' matrimony. I wur young then, an' had many foolish notions in my head, an' I wur some'at proud o' the ruther han'some face that natur' had intrusted to my keer, an' the captivatin' mustash that adorned my upper lip.

"I fell in love with a gal, the purtiest gal, I reckon, that ever walked the face o' the airth. At least she wur the most lovely critter I ever see'd in my life. In course, though, things didn't run smoothly. I had a rival—a dark-faced, villainous-lookin' feller, who wur mighty rich, an' who allers wore fine clothes. His name wur Kirke Davereaux, the same chap, Graham, what rode right into our camp night afore last on his

big black hoss. The very same chap, Graham, an' when I've told ye about him, ye'll say it's no wonder I flew off the handle at sight of him, an' was so mad that I couldn't see straight enough to hit him when I shot.

"He wur my rival—he loved the same passon as I did—the same Bessie—the pure, the beautiful, the innocent angel, who deserved a far better an' nobler husban' than either he or I 'ud make.

"I got her. I wur her favored suitor, an' I must say it kinder tuck me back, fur I had hardly dared to hope that I'd be so successful in competin' with such a wealthy, well-dressed, puss-proud, good-lookin' cuss. We wur married, Bessie an' I, an' fur three years we lived together in perfect happiness, Davereaux having shifted fur parts unknown as soon as the rumor wur afloat that we wur going to be spliced. A child wur born to us, the sweetest little thing that ever saw daylight. It turned out to be the very image of its mother, an' as older it grew the more it resembled her, an' I knowed 'twas goin' to be jest such another bein'.

"As I said, three years passed away, an' durin' that time nothin' occurred to mar our peace an' happiness, an' our child wur one year old.

"One evenin', when my day's labor wur done, I walked into the house, an' thar she is my wife lyin' dead on the floor! No marks o' violence wur on her pusson, notbin' to tell how she wur killed, an' at first I thort it wur one o' these sudden deaths that so frequently occur, caused by heart deceas, or bunkthin'."

Here the trapper seemed about to break down, but he stilled the groan that rose to his lips, and compressed his teeth with an effort to regain his composure. He succeeded, and continued:

"But I conjectur'd wrongly. She had not died a natur'l death, but had been killed. On the table, near whar she wur lyin', wur a note. To this note wur appended the name o' Kirke Davereaux! The black-hearted villain had kill'd my wife—my Bessie—she who war dearer to me than the breath o' life! In that note he explained it all to me. He said he had swore that vengeance should be his, on the day that he learned of our engagement, but he'd not intended to do what

he did. He meant to murder me, but coul' never obtain a suitable opportunity, an' as a last resort he went to her, for, he sel', we shouldn't live together no longer.

"He sel' he forced a deadly pizen down her throat, though he kinder hated to, 'cause he'd much ruther it 'ud been me. I wish to the Lord it hed been me instead o' her!"

"I laid the case afore the authorities, but that did no good. Davereaux was not found. Thar wur but few who had seen him, an' none o' them knowed whar he went. He'd made hisself skeeree, an' not a trace o' him could be found anywhar, though weeks an' months wur spent in s'archin' for him.

"My darlin' Bessie wur laid in her grave. I nearly went mad. Some sed I wur crazy fur awhile, but I don't think I wur, though I did rave a little. Kneelin' over her grave, I made a solemn vow that she should be avenged if I ever met Kirke Davereaux ag'in."

"Shortly after, I became a hunter an' trapper. Leadin' that kind o' life, I thort I might be more likely to partly furgit my grief in the continual excitement, than to remain quiet at home whar ev'rything 'ud remind me o' my lost Bessie, an' do nothin' but brood over my sorrow. Once I wished lowt I could die too, but then I thort o' the leetle child I hed to s'port, an' didn't wish that no more. A friend o' mine, named John Lawrence, kindly consented to take the child an' keepr her, while I devoted myself to huntin' an' trappin'."

"From that time to this I've followed that occupation, trappin' part o' the time on the Yallerstone an' vicinity, an' a right smart amazin' the beaver runs up in Oregon. Hundreds of beaver an' otter hav become my victims in that time."

"Well, just two years ago I went to St. Loney, as I often did afore, to see Bessie—that's what we named her. She wur six or seven years old then, an' the very picter of her mother."

"Lawrence, the feller what she was livin' with, told me that he an' his family wur goin' to San Francisco, California, an' asked me if they should take Bessie with 'em. I hesitated fur awhile, an' tried to find another place fer her to live. But I found none that suited me, an' so I tell Lawrence that he could keep Bessie an' take her with him, though I was ruther afear'd to let her cross this wild Irijun land."

"Thar wur only two wagons went, an' I wur so afear'd that

they'd be attacked by red-skins that I hed a notion to 'company 'em, sur I loved Bessie. She wur all I hed on airth, an' I wouldn't 'a' gi'n her sur all the gold that wur ever dug. Dear, dear little birdie!

"Two weeks arter the departure o' the fam'ly, I wur on the prairie ag'in, an' thar I hope I may be shot ef I didn't come across John Lawrence!

"He wur by hisself, wur bareheaded, half starved, clothes ragged, no loss to ride, an' above all, broken-hearted. His heart had been crushed by an awful blow, an' what he told me bowed me down with sorrow, also.

"He sed they hed been attacked by a band o' Injuns, an' all his fam'ly but hisself wur murdered by the bloody imps, an' how he escaped 'em he hardly knowed. I axed him 'bout my darter Bessie, an' he told me that she did not share the fate of the others, but wur carried away a pris'ner, alive an uninjured.

"I wur inclined to be delighted at this, though why she should be saved when the rest wur not, wur sunkthin' I couldn't account sur. But Lawrence explained this to me by informin' me that the leader o' the red-skins wur none other than *Kirke Davereaux!*

"This I could hardly b'lieve at fust, but he swere it wur the truth, an' I hed to knock under, 'cause I was sartin that he knowed Kirke Davereaux as well as I, an' that he wouldn't swear 'twur him unless he wur sure it *wur* him. Why the scoundrel went an' jined the Injuns I can't tell, unless he dan it to place them miser'ble cusses between him an' the law, an' thus escape the punishment he so richly deserved for committin' that horrible daylight murder.

"It wur plain to me now, why Bessie wur not murdered wi' the rest. It wur not the work o' the red-skins, but that o' thar white leader. He wur prob'ly enamored with her booty, jest as he wur with her mother afore her, an' hed concluded to hav her hisself.

"I felt like givin' up then, as all I hed to live fur wur taken from me, an' I hed no hope o' ever seein' her ag'in. But Lawrence sed I hed sunkthin' to live fur, an' that he hed too: an' that wur, revenge. He wur well-nigh crazy, an' he cussed ev'ry Injon in the land. We shook han's an' tek a solemn

vow that our lives should from that time be devoted to the accomplishin' o' one task. We would live fur nothin' thar-after but fur the sole purpose of avengin' our lost dear ones.

"We lived together after that, shootin' every blasted red-skin that come in our way, especially the Sioux, as the Injuns who massacred the Lawrence fam'ly b'longed to that nation. John Lawrence hated 'em wuss 'n I did, fur it wur not them, but Davereaux, who had so foully murdered my dear young wife, an' stole away my darlin' child, all that wur left me in this world. Lawrence wur nearly crazy, an' he didn't keer a tinker's darn how many Injuns come in his way, he'd try to kill 'em all.

"An' his rashness wur the ruin o' him. Poor feller! he wur killed jest one year ago by the red scamps, an' though I done all I could to save him, it wur impossible, an' I well-nigh lost my own skulp in the effort. I reckon it wur well that he died when he did, fur his life wur one of intoler'ble misery, an' now he's gone to that other an' better kentry, whar he can live in eternal happiness in the society of his wife an' chil'勒o. I buried him purty deep under ground, so that his remailes could enjoy that last rest undisturbed by prowlin' wolves, an' other ravenous animiles.

"Then I was alone. Since he wur called hum, I have been a lone wanderer, rovin' all over this kentry in company with nobody.

"I wui huntin' fur Kirke Davereaux, but I never could succeed in layin' my peepers on him, till the other night, Graham, when he appeared to us so unexpectedly.

"Never mind. I will find him yet. I will kill him! I will tear his heart out! I will laugh to see him writhe in agony when I torture him to death! He shall die—ha! ha! he shall die—die the death of a dog!"

Having worked himself to a pitch of excitement, Delmer now relapsed into silence, looking straight ahead, with pallid face, flashing eyes, contracted brows, and his broad chest rising and falling with the intensity of his emotion.

Harry and I had become deeply interested in his rather extraordinary narrative, and we both expressed our deep sympathy for the poor, heart-broken man, who had borne up so bravely under his terrible load of sorrow.

No wonder I had conjectured, at first sight of him, that some fearful calamity had befallen him, and rendered his existence miserable. No wonder he became so enraged, and acted so strangely, at sight of the fine-looking horseman on the night when we first met. And no wonder that at times I fell into those fits of musing, when his face would undergo such a remarkable change, and he appeared to be living over his past life again.

We truly and deeply sympathized with him, and when we told him as much, he grasped a hand of each and shook it warmly, while a tear dropped down on his bearded cheek, and he seemed greatly agitated.

He was ~~in~~ himself the rest of the afternoon, and Harry and I said but little to him, as we could see that he wished to be left alone.

We contented ourselves by talking together about what had occurred since our separation, what we could tell the folks on our return home, and other things of no greater importance.

During the remainder of that day, nothing exciting took place, and when night came we picketed our horses, and slept—I, for one, in much better spirits than on the preceding night.

CHAPTER IX.

BEHIND THE BLUFF.

ERE the sun had risen on the following morning, we were again astride of our animals, galloping them swiftly over the prairie toward the great trail that leads through the mountains.

We were progressing finely now, and Dave thought we would not be molested again by Indians, as no signs of them were visible.

But as everybody is liable to mistakes, so was the trapper mistaken in this instance.

We soon reached a broad, shallow stream, that flowed di-

rectly across our path, and on the bank of which we halted to view the scenery a moment, and rest our tired steeds.

It was a pretty water-course, very wide for its depth, flowing with a musical, rippling sound, over the white sandy bottom, which could be seen at any point through the clear water. Troops of little fishes darted hither and thither, flashing like burnished silver in the sunlight when they would suddenly change their course, or when they would leap, as they frequently did, clear above the surface of the glassy water.

"We have a very good view of the country here," observed Harry, who was a lover of nature, and he looked quietly about him, gazing longest on the picturesque landscape that lay to the westward of us.

"And it is worth viewing, too," I added, enjoying the scene as much as he. "Am I not right, Dave?" I asked, turning to the trapper.

Dave made no reply, nor did he even glance at me, or move as I put the question to him. In fact, he appeared to be totally unaware that I had addressed him.

He sat like a statue on his horse, his body slightly inclined forward, looking steadily at something in front of him.

Evidently his mind was occupied with something else, so that he failed to hear the words intended for his ears.

"Why, Dave, what's the matter—what are you looking at?" broke in Harry, just as I was about to say something to the same effect.

"What am I lookin' at?" said the hunter, straightening himself up, and turning to us with a meaning smile.

"Yes—what are you looking at so attentively?"

"That bluff over yender."

"Bluff?"

"Exactly; don't ye see it?"

"Where?"

"Right yander on t'other side o' the creek," and he pointed out the object.

It was a huge, rocky bluff, towering up into the air on the opposite bank of the stream, and directly in front of us, as we sat on our horses just as we had stopped them on arriving at the creek.

It rose up rather abruptly from the plain, and presented a smooth and almost perpendicular front, rising up from the water, that washed its broad, dark base, to the height of about forty feet. Its other sides were rough, and partially covered with bushes growing in thick, tangled clumps, though steep withal, and apparently difficult to climb.

"To be sure I see that," I said, after looking closely at it for a moment. "I could not fail to see it, looming up, as it is, directly before our eyes."

"Wal, that's what I wur starin' at," said the hunter, with a quiet grin.

"Yes, but your whole mind seemed to be on what you saw. I see nothing about that rock that would be at all likely to hold your attention as it appeared to be held."

"Young man, *thar's Injuns behind that rock!*" calmly but emphatically remarked Dave.

"What?"

I was startled and alarmed, for I had not a doubt that Dave was in earnest.

Harry echoed my exclamation, but the next instant he burst out into fit of laughter.

"Pardon my incredulity, Delmer," he cried, "but I must say that I could very easily doubt the truthfulness of your assertion. Surely, old fellow, you are not serious?"

"I sartinly are. I wur never more in 'arnest than I are now, an' I say ag'in that red-skins are concealed on t'other side o' that place jest as sure as yer a livin' critter."

There was no room left now to admit of a doubt that he was serious, not even in the mind of Harry, who was at first disposed to deem his testimony incredible.

"But how do you know, Dave?"

"No matter how I know. It's enough that I do know, an' by Jupiter, our skulps are in danger jest as sure as Dave Delmer's a sinner."

"What shall we do, Dave?" we asked, really alarmed by the cool declaration of the hunter. "We look upon you as our leader, and our safety depends on the course of action you propose."

"Jest keep still a minnit, till I cogitate," requested the Hunter. "Thar's more'n one chap alid there, I opine, an' they've

all got bosses, too, or I'm mighty much mistooken. Ef thar warn't but one man I reckon he could hold his ground ag'in' a dozen, ef he'd only git up on top o' the rock, consequentlly it 'ull not do to attack the cusses."

He ceased speaking, and looked thoughtfully at the bluff, while Harry and I, looking at the same object, half expected to have a volley poured into us, or to see a party of mounted Indians dash out from behind it and approach us.

Dave was about to speak again, when we were all amazed by seeing three horses walk out from behind the bluff!

They were not mounted, and they walked slowly, but with short, quick steps, and with heads erect.

They walked but a short distance, when they stopped and stood perfectly still on the bank of the creek. Their sides were toward us, and not once did they look at us, ignorant, to all appearance, of our existence.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Harry, turning to the trapper, who was closely watching the horses, with a dark frown contracting his brows. "You were mistaken, old fellow, as you see, in supposing that Indians were so near."

"Din't s'pose it—I knowed it," growled Dave.

"Dil, eh?" I put in, laughing also, in my delight at seeing how favorably this thing had resulted. "Well, sir, you must see that you are wrong. Those animals are not mounted. They are only wild horses, and certainly there is nothing to be feared from them."

"Ain't mounted, eh?"

"No—of course they are not," I answered.

"To be sure they are not. Can't you see?" added Harry, with an air of assurance.

"Sartinly. 'Spesct I kin see better'n you," was the cool reply, "'cause I kin see that them animals is mounted, an' ye say they're not."

We looked curiously at the hunter.

"Ye may think it rather doubtful," said he, "but ye'll soon find out that it's a fact."

"Pshaw! you are very unreasonable," I exclaimed; "if there were men on their backs would not they be visible at so small a distance?"

"Ef ye'll put a stop to that meat-trap o' your'n, an' lend

me yer ear fur 'bout a seckund or sich, I'll make a powerful effort to eggsplain."

Being perfectly willing to hear an explanation of what we deemed so absolutely absurd, we readily complied with his request.

"Now, said he, "level yer peepers right at the backs o' them mustangs, an' see ef ye can't see a little pertubrance thar."

"Their backs?"

"Yas; a little black thing what don't b'long to the beasts themselves."

We bent a piercing gaze on the three horses, and indeed we did see on the back of every one a small black object, so small that it coul'l hardly be seen from our position.

"Yes, we see them, but what are they?"

"Them," said the trapper, "is Injuns' feet."

"Possible!"

"An' the Injuns can't be seen fur the simple reason that they're on t'other side o' that mustangs," continued Delmer. "They're layin' right along on the sides o' that horses, holdin' on by that mane an' necks, an' by the foot that kin lar'lly be seen frum hyar."

Both Harry and I had often heard of this practice of the western Indian, to shield himself from the shots of the enemy, and we were well satisfied with, and perfectly willing to believe, the explanation of our experienced friend.

"Knowed they wur not wild 'uns," said he, "Might knowed they wouldn't 'a' walked out that a-way, in single file, holdin' thar heads up, an' then all stop at the same time an' stan' quiet 'thout lookin' round, unless they wur under the control o' thar masters."

"You are right, Dave," returned Harry. "You were not as much mistaken as we thought you were. But why the deuce don't you tell us what to do? Surely, to remain here is not the best thing we can do, when nothing is easier than to step back out of rifle-range of those brutes."

The trapper made no reply to this, but after a pause he said :

"Look yender, boys: don't ye see an Injan's head right under the neck o' that foremost hoss—hey?"

We could not see the head of which the hunter spoke, but

knowing that he was more capable than we of spying distant objects, we supposed that he was right.

"Well," he went on to say, "whether ye see it or not, it's true, right under that foremost hoss's neck, an' it's the coky-lit o' one o' them ar' Blasé i brutes, too, or I'm no judge!"

And without another word, he deliberately lifted his gun to a level with his shoulder, and brought it to bear on the "coky-lit."

"Th' other?" exclaimed Harry, "you are not going to shoot, are you? You'll hit the horse!"

"He! He! He! Reckon ye don't know Dave Delmer quite so well as I do, or ye wouldn't say that. Yes, I'm goin' to shoot, an' I won't touch a ha'r o' the critter the blasted coward's bidin' alhind."

"But if you shoot one, the rest will be down upon us with a vengeance."

"Let 'em come, then; that'll be one less to contend with."

And with this he pulled the trigger, and the carefully-sized rifle was discharged, with a quick, sharp report.

Simultaneously with the report, we saw an Indian drop to the ground with a shriek, where he tumbled and squirmed in mortal agony for a moment, screaming loudly the while, and then lay quiet in death.

The horse, with a forward bound, and a wild neigh of affright, dashed away at the top of his speed, while on the backs of the remaining two there appeared, as if by magic, two half-naked Indians!

Another instant and they had disappeared behind the bluff, whence they had come, and then a loud cry as if from a score of throats was borne to our ears.

"Well, that was quickly done," said I, drawing a breath of relief when I saw that the act had not brought on an immediate attack.

"It was that," responded Harry; "and that poor devil over yonder is dead as a doornail, isn't he, Delmer?"

"I rather guess he are," replied the hunter. "Reckon ye'd be deadier nor a doornail if I should put a chunk o' cold lead in yer cranium, as I did in his'n."

"Do you know to what tribe these chaps belong?"

"To be sure I do. They're Sioux."

"Sioux? A fierce tribe, I have heard."

"Yas, the same kind o' Injuns what that Blasted Davereaux wur leadin' when the Lawrence fam'ly wur massacred, an' my little Bessie wur captur'd."

"How many do you think they number?"

"'Bout twenty, I should judge."

"No more?"

"Think not — p'raps less. But the Lora knows that's enough. Them three cusses come out to take a look at us, an' they thort we'd be foolish enough to let 'em pull the wool over our peepers by ridin' out as they did."

"Yes, and I presume one of them, at least, is satisfied that he was mistaken, as death was the penalty of his blunder."

"Right, youngster, but that's more left, an' I 'spect the death o' thar kumrid has so enraged 'em that they feel sort o' like tearin' us to pieces an' givin' us to the wolves. I think we'd better move back out o' rifle range of 'em, or we'll regret it when it's too late."

"Just what we think, Dave—"

"Thunder an' lightnin'! Look yender!" suddenly ejaculated the trapper, causing Harry and myself to jump nearly out of our saddles.

"Why, Dave, what in the name of all that's wonderful ails you?" laughed Harry.

Dave said nothing in answer to this, but he was pointing across the stream.

We looked in that direction, but saw nothing to excite alarm—nothing that could have caused that startling exclamation.

"What is it, Dave?" I asked.

The trapper drew a long breath and dropped his hand to his side.

"I see'd Kirke Davereaux then, jest as sure as I'm a sinner," said he, firmly.

"What?" I exclaimed. "Where did you see him?"

"Right on top o' that bluff over yender."

"On top? You don't mean that!"

"Yas, on top. He rose up thar, an' stood right straight up fur 'bout a sekund lookin' at us, an' then he jumped back out o' sight."

"Wonderful, truly. But are you sure it was he?"

"Course I are. I see'd him plainly, from head to foot, an' I know it wur him as well as I know ye're Graham, an' I do know that's yer name better'n ye think I do, maybe. I'm goin' to hang around hyar now, till I kin git a chance to blow his brains out!"

"No, no, Dave."

"I tell ye I will," he cried, frowning, and I deemed it better to say no more against his decision, as the sight of Kinke Davereaux had aroused the sleeping lion within him.

Harry and I exchanged glances.

"Don't say any thing in opposition to his determination," whispered Harry, "for I believe we can do no better than act in accordance with his directions whatever they may be."

After a short consultation we wheeled our horses round, and galloped a short distance on the back track.

When we were far enough from the bluff to fear nothing from the fire-arms of the Indians, for the purpose, as Delmer said, of besieging the white man and his red followers, we dismounted and went into camp.

CHAPTER X.

WATCHING.

"Why don't they come out, Dave?" I inquired, as we reclined on the soft grass, all watching the bluff narrowly. "Why do they remain behind their fortification when they are so much stronger than we? They could annihilate us if they would but try."

"Don't feel yerself!" meaningly rejoined the hunter. "Thar may be no more'n ten o' them pesky rascals arter all. But the reason they don't come out, I reckon, is 'cause they're under the leadership o' that cowardly Davereaux, an' he's afraid to show hisself long enough to let me draw a bead on him."

"Then why don't they leave that place if they have no intention of showing fight?"

"'Cause I s'pose they're in no hurry. They want to show us that they are not afear'd to stay thar as long as they please. I think, hows'mever, that they're goin' to wait that fur the darkness o' night, an' then come ag'in' us, for I know that Davereaux would give all he possesses, life excepted, to git me safely shuffled off to the happy huntin'-ground. They don't want to do any thing now, 'cause if they do they'll be sure to lose one or more o' that number, what's ef they wait till night they might 'complish all they want to 'thout the loss of a single man. Guess they've learned by this time that 'tain't zackly healthy to git in range o' this shooter, not even ef they hide abind thar critters."

All day we remained there, and during that time not a sign of life was visible at the bluff.

We kindled a fire, prepared our meals, and ate them, undisturbed, and without fear of molestation, for Dave's opinion was ours, that we would not be molested until nightfall.

Once we endeavored to divert Dave from his determination to remain there until night, for we thought, or rather hoped, that if his consent could be gained, the enemy might allow us to withdraw from the spot, and resume our journey in peace.

But his consent was not to be obtained. All we could say or do had no power to alter his resolution, and knowing that further attempts to dissuade him from his purpose would be entirely lost upon him, we refrained from saying more on the subject.

The sun sunk behind the western mountains.

The soft shades of twilight gathered around us, and gradually deepened into night, while the little twinkling stars peeped timidly forth one by one in the cloudless sky, and all nature seemed hushed into a solemn silence by the slowly thickening shadows.

Our hearts beat fast now—Harry's and mine at any rate—as the time had come when we expected to be placed deeper into the danger that hovered around us through the day; when we expected to be attacked by overwhelming numbers of ferocious Sioux—murdered—butchered—scalped—it was too

horrible to contemplate, and I tried to drive the sickening vision from my mind and be as self-possessed as the trapper, Dave Delmer.

He seemed wholly unmoved, except, indeed, when the name of Kiske Davreaux was mentioned, and then his face would darken, his massive breast would heave, and his breath would come with a hissing sound through his clenched teeth and distended nostrils.

Good cause had he to hate that man—the murderer of his wife, and abductor of his daughter.

Over the gleamed brightly, and as we sat around it Harry and Dave puffed their pipes industriously, a habit which, fortunately, I had never fallen into.

"Wal, boys," said Dave, knocking the ashes from his pipe, which example was soon followed by Harry, "it's 'bout time for ye to go to roost, ef ye wants ter sleep any this night."

"What I was thinking," said I; "but we must not all sleep at the same time?"

"Course not. Ten to one we'd wake up to find our throats cut an' skulps gone."

"Then I will stand guard while you sleep."

"Yell do no such a thing," rejoined the hunter. "I'll do the lay-out, 'cause why? I've had more experience in that line than ye have, an' the responsibility is too great fur ye. I'll take it on my shoulders, an' I s'pect I'm a leetle more capable o' performin' the duty."

"Do you actually think we'll be attacked?"

"I'd stake my life on't."

This satisfied me that I was not the one to take upon myself the danger and responsibility of guard, and Dave's resolution to perform that duty was not opposed.

Harry and I stretched ourselves on the grass, while the trapper stood himself near us with his keen eyes ever on the lookout for danger and his gun ever ready to be used at a moment's notice. The greater part of the time his gaze was directed at the river, but occasionally he would slowly move in a circle round the fire, peering through the gloom in every direction, so that it would have been difficult for an enemy to approach unbeknown to him.

I was very sleepy, and despite the unpleasant thoughts

that haunted me, such as of Indians murdering me in my sleep, I had lain but a short time when my eyelids were sealed, and I passed quietly away to the land of dreams.

I can not tell exactly how long I remained there, nor does it matter.

When I returned to consciousness it was still dark, and that solemn silence reigned as before. I raised my head and looked around.

What was my surprise and alarm on making the discovery that Harry Sprague was no longer lying beside me! I had left him there when I fell asleep, but he was not there now, neither was he anywhere near.

I sprung to my feet with a suspicion that all was not right, and as fully awake as ever I had been. I glanced hurriedly about with a hope that he was not far away, but he was not in sight.

Where could he be? What had taken him away? I thought he must have left of his own accord, else why was I not disturbed?

The thought now presented itself that he had joined Delmer, being unable to sleep, and I looked to see if such was the case.

Imagine my amazement on finding that he, also, was gone. He was nowhere to be seen, though I searched for him carefully!

The smoldering fire did little service in the way of dispelling the gloom, but I thought he could be seen if he was at his post.

“Dave—Harry!”

I repeated their names in a low, guarded voice, and then listened attentively to catch the answer, if any were given. I was really alarmed now, for the safety of my companions and I drew horrible pictures in my mind of their probable fate. They might have spied an Indian lurking near, reconnoitering us, and had left me for the purpose of trying to capture him.

No answer did I receive to my call, though I listened in silence for at least a minute. I repeated the call in a higher key, and then again still louder, but meeting with no better success than at first, I concluded that I was really alone.

The fire that was crackling so cheerfully and glaring so brightly when I first laid down, was reduced to a bed of living coals, save that one sagot was but half-consumed and still supported a flickering blaze. This went to prove that Dave was not near, for I had heard him say that it should not go down the least bit during the night, and I could see that it had not been attended to within a half-hour, at the least calculation.

I now began to think it necessary to act, for to remain here in painful uncertainty as to the fate or whereabouts of my comrades was more than I could do. I would hunt for them, and that without further delay.

And I did. Turning my back upon the dying embers and my face toward the creek, I plunged unhesitatingly into the darkness.

Though this direction would take me nearer and nearer to the hiding place of the savages, yet I thought not of the peril, only that I was taking the proper course to find the two stragglers. They surely could have had no object in wandering away in any other direction, while in this they might have seen something that had aroused their suspicions, or were watching for a movement of the enemy.

Whatever might be their object in leaving me alone, I must hunt them up, and I would find them, too, if they were anywhere in the vicinity of the place where I suspected they were.

I pushed steadily on toward the creek, through the gloom that enshrouded me, wishing that some sound, however slight, would occur to break that awful silence. It was so terrible as to make me feel uneasy, and almost dampen my courage. I felt as though every living thing, save myself, had been swept from the face of the earth. I believe if an Indian had given utterance to a loud war-whoop within twelve feet of me, it would have been a relief.

Suddenly I stopped. Standing in front of me, directly in my path, and only a few paces distant, was a tall, dark figure.

It was a man. I could see the outlines of his gigantic frame. Yes, it was a man, and a big, muscular one, at that. A man of Herculean proportions, whose strength, no doubt,

was far superior to mine, and who looked as if he could ~~had~~ killed me with one blow of his fist.

He was standing silent and motionless. He was on the bank of the stream, too, for I could hear the low, ~~low~~ ~~and~~ murmur of the water, and see the shining crests of the little dancing ripples just beyond him.

That it was an Indian I had not a doubt, and I thought that the sooner he was shot the better it would be for me. He appeared to have no thought of harming me; in fact, was not positive that he saw me, so I deemed it best to avail myself of the opportunity to rid myself of this obstacle that was preventing my further progress.

Slowly I raised my gun to my shoulder. Still the steady figure moved not.

My finger touched the trigger. I glanced along the barrel, and the next second would doubtless have witnessed the death of a valuable friend, had not his familiar voice prevented.

"Tuar, ~~Indian~~, don't shoot."

The weapon was lowered on the instant.

"Why, Dave, is that you?" I cried, my voice trembling with excitement, occasioned by finding how near I had come to shooting Dave Delmer, who had so kindly befriended me, to whom I was so deeply indebted, and whom I would not wittingly harm for any thing.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "I thought you were an Indian, Dave."

"Did ye?"

"I really did, and had you been an instant later in speaking, you would now have been food for the buzzards."

"That's the reason I spoke," was the quiet rejoinder.

"My finger was already on the trigger," I added.

"That's nothin'. A miss is as good as a mile, y' know. But, ~~Indian~~, what in the name o' the Old Spaghetti did ye follow me hyar fur? Couldn't ye git along a mite without me?"

"Yes, I suppose I could, but how did I know that you would ever return. I awoke, and on finding myself entirely alone—"

"Alone?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Warn't ~~S~~trague thar?"

"There was not a soul there—nobody near."

"Wal, I'll sw'ar, that's queer," said the trapper, with a searching look at my face, as though he questioned my seriousness.

"Did you leave him there?" I asked, with a painful apprehension taking possession of me.

"Sartinly, I did. When I left he wur lyin' right along; o' ye, an' ye wur both sleepin' as sound as a couple o' bricks, and I could tell by Dave's voice that he was uneasy on Harry's account. As he was uneasy, I knew that I had good cause to be likewise.

"I left," went on Dave, "'cause I see'd a red-skin skulkin' roun' the premises. He wur reconnoiterin' our lodgin'-place like he had a right, an' I thort I'd better give him my assistance, seein' as how he wur doin' a purty big job by hisself. So I went to skulkin' too, jest as he wur doin'. Reckon he didn't appreciate my kindness. Anyhow, he begun to draw off as ef he deemed it best to accept no favors from one o' my color. But I wur determined, an' I kep' right arter him. I followed him to the creek hyar, only a good deal furder down yender, an' thar I knifed him."

"Killed him, eh?"

"Sorter. He didn't raise any disturbance, though, but quietly gin' up the ghost, as ef he thunk it wur the best thing under the circumstances he could do. When I flung him into the river he wur jest as limber as an old worn-out dish-cloth."

When ~~D~~elmer had finished, I proposed returning to our fire, to see if Harry had returned, for in truth I could not rest until he was found. The best friend I had on earth, it is no wonder I trembled for his safety. I felt then, that if his rashness had cost him his life, I would never be myself again.

But my proposition did not meet with Delmer's approval.

"That's no necessity o' goin' back to the fire," said he, "fur if ~~S~~trague returns thar an' finds us missin', he'll not stay thar a minute. It'll come most nat'r'l fur him to take this d'rection in leavin' fur us, too, an' ef he do he can't help findin' us."

"And what about the Indians, Dave?" I inquired. "Do you think they mean fight?"

"Yas, I think they do. I think they are workin' this **very** minnit, an' plannin' some way to send us all to Old Nick 'ithout losin' one o' thar gang. They've lost two on 'em a'redly, though, an' I'll stake all I'm worth ag'in' an old moccasin that more on 'em 'll go under afore I do."

We talked on, Dave and I, for perhaps a half-hour, sitting on the grassy river-bank. The sharp-sighted hunter was continually glancing from one point to another, and his quick ear was ever ready to note the slightest sound, so that nothing could have come very near to us without his knowledge.

Still, all was silent. Every thing seemed dead, and we could hardly think that Indians were near.

Presently, Dave rose to his feet.

"Graham," said he, "I can't stand this. It's 'bout midnight now, an' nothin's done."

"Well, what can we do?"

"I'll tell ye. Ye know I sed I wur a-goin' to hang round hyar till I could find a chance to settle up with Kirke Davenport. Wa', hyar's half o' the night spent, an' he an' his band nev done little or nothin'. I've begun to think that it may be thar intention to draw off an' leave us unmolested, jest 'cause they're afriad to risk thar own wuthless lives. Now I don't want 'em to do this till I kin git a shot at that cuss, an' I ain't goin' to wait fur 'em to leave, an' lose ev'ry chance o' 'complishin' the task that's got to be 'complished afore I die."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Jest this:—But in the fust place tell me ef yer afriad to stay hyar alone fur awhile?"

"Why, no, Dave, to be sure I am not," I replied, somewhat proudly.

"Wal, I'm goin' up the river a piece, an' then I'm goin' to cross it to the other side. I'll hang around that bluff till I kin git sight o' that monster, an' then I'll end his earthly existence ef I know I'll be killed an' haggled to pieces fur it the next minnit."

"But, Dave, you certainly have no desire to place your life in such peril merely for the sake of obtaining revenge?" I expostulated.

"No partic'lar desire," he responded, "but I believe it's the

last chance, an' I'd take advantage of it ef it wur twice as slim."

I saw that to dissuade him from his purpose would be simply impossible.

Knowing this, I refrained from saying more in opposition to the course of action he had decided on taking, and merely told him that he need have no fear for my safety in remaining there alone.

Without another word he whirled round and walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XI.

A FATAL RECONNOISSANCE.

I sat alone on the bank of the stream; alone with my thoughts in the darkness that enveloped the earth.

Dave was gone to pay an old debt to one who richly deserved it, and to accomplish it he must place himself in great danger, and be very fortunate to retain his life!

Harry was—where?

How I wished that the night had passed, that day had come again, that we were once more gathered together and our journey resumed. Morning might dawn to find us all dead—Harry might be now, though I endeavored to keep the horrible probability from my mind, and to think him yet alive and safe.

The silent darkness, the soft, mournful music of the water at my feet, served to make my reflections more gloomy, for they seemed to tell of coming evil, to predict a sad catastrophe, and to be expressing their pity.

On the opposite bank towered the huge, frowning bluff, whose dark front was faintly visible. Not a sound proceeded from it. I began to suspect that the cowardly, crafty renegade had quietly drawn off his forces. I hoped that such was the case, and that we were left at liberty to go on our way rejoicing.

All on a sudden my reflections were interrupted. The

sound of approaching footsteps aroused me from the reverie into which I had fallen immediately after Delmer's departure.

Approaching footsteps. Something—*may, somebody*, was coming toward me; somebody belonging to the Indian race, I had no doubt.

I sprung to my feet. Why was this person hurrying so? Whoever he was, he was coming at a rapid rate, as though his life depended on his fleetness of foot.

He was coming up the river-bank, too, and if I remained here he could not help seeing me. If I should wait for him and allow him to see me, a violent collision might be the consequence. But I would not remain there. That would be an unnecessary risk, when I might easily conceal myself and allow him to remain in ignorance, perhaps, of my existence.

Obeying the more prudent suggestion of my mind, I moved back a few paces from the water, in order to let the stranger pass without encountering me, for I judged by the footsteps that he would pass close to the brink.

There I threw myself down on the ground, and lay at full length in the grass, my gun cocked and freshly primed, ready for instant service if necessity required.

The supposed red-man came on with speed unabated. I lay perfectly still, waiting for him to come up, and with a firm determination to fire upon him if he should discover me, giving him no chance to deal with me in a like manner.

I now became aware that instead of one there were *two* persons coming.

This was not a pleasant discovery, to say the least. Two Indians, should they find me, would not be managed as easily as one, and I doubted if it would be possible for me to dispatch them both and remain uninjured.

Now I was less surprised than before at the extreme hurry of the savages. I at once arrived at the conclusion that one was hotly pursuing the other.

But why was this? If they were both Indians, why was one chasing the other? If they both belonged to Daveretax's band they certainly were not enemies. But it was hardly probable that they would act thus if they were friends. This I could not see through clearly. I must wait for their arrival near me, when it would possibly be explained.

It might be a red-man pursuing a white. Of course it was not Dave Delmer, for they were approaching from the direction directly opposite to that which Dave had taken when he left me.

But Harry—it could be Harry. He might have wandered down the river to see if danger was yet hovering round, or, likely, to hunt for Delmer, having awakened and found that Harry missing. If he it was, I would probably be able to rescue him from the very jaws of death, which I had done once and would be glad to do again.

On came the unseen racers, nearer and nearer, the sound of their footsteps growing more distinct at every step.

Now I see them—nay, only one. His tall form looms up in the darkness like a shadow, as he comes bounding on.

Nearer he comes, and I find that he is not an Indian, but a white man.

And more. The unmistakable profile of Harry Sprague was presented to view!

It was he indeed, just as I had begun to suspect. Harry was yet alive, which I was very glad to learn, but still in imminent danger, as it seemed. He had doubtless done something rash, and to get out of it was obliged to make a long stretch at the top of his speed.

I remained quiet and allowed him to pass me by, seeing the necessity of turning my attention to his persecutor if I wished to help him.

The pursuer came in sight.

He was an Indian, as I had guessed—a big, powerful, fleet-footed Indian!

Without waiting for him to come up, I jumped lightly to my feet to meet him. I stepped forward directly in his path and stood facing him as he dashed toward me.

Quick as thought my rifle leaped to my shoulder. I took aim at the stalwart savage. I pulled the trigger without hesitation. Instantly the melancholy quiet of the night was broken by a loud, sharp report.

With a low, gurgling yell, the savage sprung upward, and then fell with a loud splash into the dark stream, where he sank without another struggle. I had killed him. I had saved my chum, perhaps from death, or, at least, I took de-

light in thinking so, though he might have succeeded in slaying his pursuer himself.

Finding that I had done the work to such perfection, I lost no time in turning round and calling to Harry.

"Harry!" I cried, in a loud voice. "Harry, come back you are safe."

Instantly, a voice within a few feet of me laughingly replied:

"Yes, I see I am, Bob, and it is to you that I am indebted for my safety."

And Harry Sprague appeared before me, grasped my hand and shook it warmly, laughing the while at my astonishment.

I had seen him dash past me so swiftly, and thought him far away by this time, and no wonder I was surprised to find him so near when I called.

"Why, old, fellow, how is this?" I exclaimed. "I thought you were a few miles distant by this time, judging from the wonderful rate of speed that was yours when you passed me."

"Ha! ha! ha! Bob, is that all that disturbs your peace of mind?" laughed the reckless fellow. "Well, I stumbled and fell just here. That is the reason why I could not reach the distance you thought I should obtain."

"Oh, that is it, eh? Then of course you are excusable, if you fell."

"But, Bob," he broke forth, growing suddenly sober, "how came you here just in the nick of time? If you hadn't killed that red-skin just when you did your assistance would have been useless I fear, for my scalp would have been in his possession ere I could have regained my feet, and my spirit somewhere else."

"Well, Harry," I rejoined, "before I tell you that I want you to tell me where you have been, why you went, and what you passed through since leaving me. Dave and I have both been troubled about you."

"To begin at the beginning," said he, "I will tell you why I went a way. I awoke and found that Dave was not on his post, neither was he to be found near the fire. You were sleeping soundly, and as it was impossible for me to do the same, I deemed it advisable to go in search of Dave. I went, and left

you alone, as completely insensible, perhaps, as though you were dead as a door-nail. I wandered around through the darkness, but I'll be hanged if I could find Delmer. I struck the creek some distance below here. Well, as every thing was so silent, I somehow or other took the idea into my head that there were no Indians within a mile of that bluff. I resolved to cross the river and learn to a certainty whether such was the fact or not. But I was satisfied that I was mistaken by seeing an Indian approaching from the opposite shore. I tried to shoot him, but in my hurry to level my gun it fell from my hands into the water. I recovered it, but of course it was useless for the present, and as both of my pistols were empty, I saw that the only chance lay in my swiftness of foot.

"I started, and he followed. Why I ran along on the very brink of the stream I can not say, but I find it was fortunate that I took that course. But how did it happen, Bob, that you were ready to help me?"

"I will tell you," I replied. "When I awoke and made the rather unpleasant discovery that both you and Dave were missing, I concluded that that was not the place for me. So I pushed off to hunt for you. I found Dave right here where we are now."

"You did? Where is he now?"

"He went over to the other side of the stream."

"What! right among the red-skins?"

"Yes; he would go, in spite of my expostulations. He swears that Davereaux shall die before he leaves this vicinity. He said he would rather die himself than allow the fellow to escape."

Hardly were these words out of my mouth, when we were startled by the ringing report of a rifle that reached our ears from the direction of the huge rock which afforded such an excellent place of defense for the Indians.

We both started, and I was about to express my belief that the trapper had shot at somebody, or had been fired upon by a foe, when I was interrupted by a still more startling sound.

The unmistakable voice of Dave Delmer rose loud and hoarsely on the still night air, coming from the other side of the stream!

"Sprague—Graham! Run fur yer lives, an' mount yer horses! *I am shot!*"

Harry and I instinctively exchanged glances, both so amazed by the hunter's words that we could hardly speak.

Dave was killed, murdered, by the red demons—Delmer, to whom we both, perhaps, owed our lives, and whom we both had learned to like so well.

We could hardly believe that it was true. Could it be possible that he was shot? He who, but a short time ago, was so full of life and vigor? Yes, he was gone. Those fearful words still rung in our ears; those words that told of his sad fate.

He had left me, not with a full conviction, but with a strong hope that he could gain his object and return as safe as when he left. And thus it had resulted. He had perished in his effort to obtain revenge, and the effort had, in all probability, been fruitless.

"Bob, this is horrible!" ejaculated Harry, in low, husky tones. "Dave is shot—killed! What shall we do? What shall we do?"

I made no reply; I could not. To tell what was best to be done now was beyond my power.

"But maybe he is not mortally wounded, after all," added Harry, less despondently.

"There is but little room to hope that he is not," I said, sadly. "I think he knows that his hours are numbered, or he would not have commanded us to take to our horses and leave him."

"We'll not obey the command; we'll not desert him!" exclaimed my companion.

"That we will not," I firmly responded. "But," I added, "we must do something if we stay."

After a short consultation it was decided that I should cross the stream and see if Dave was really beyond assistance, while Harry would remain there and see to our horses.

I would not take the route that the trapper had taken, but would cross here at this point, and secrete myself near the bluff.

Stepping into the dark water, I waded slowly and cautiously toward the dark, frowning rock.

I had not yet reached the center, when I saw a bright flash in the bushes that skirted the base of the rock, and simultaneously the crack of a rifle rent the air, and a bullet plowed the water by my side!

"Bob, come back!" called Harry, excitedly. "This will never do. You'll be shot."

I needed not the advice. Already I had turned and was making my way to shore with a little less caution than when I had left it.

"What shall we do now?" said I, stamping my foot with vexation.

My comrade was silent. He was evidently listening intently to some sound.

CHAPTER XII.

JUST IN TIME.

"Hark," suddenly cried Harry, raising his hand as a token of silence.

"What is it? Do you hear any thing?" I queried.

"Yes, I do. 'Tis the tramp of horses' feet. Listen, and you may hear it, too."

I did as requested. A short silence followed, and then there was borne to my ears a faint sound as of the galloping of horses. It came from far away over the prairie.

"Yes, I hear it," I said. "It is just as you say. I presume there are not less than a half-dozen horsemen coming. Curses on the luck! we're the most unfortunate wretches that ever breathed the breath of life! If we are ever permitted to leave these plains it will not be with our lives!"

"There, Bob, you are not yourself now," said Harry, more cheerfully. "It is wrong to talk thus. They may not be coming toward us."

Ashamed of my weakness when my friend bore up so bravely, and inspired with fresh hope by the soundness of his suggestion, I listened again. There was another interval of silence on our part.

The suddenly kindled hope was quenched. We were soon convinced that the band was approaching us. The hoof-strokes grew more distinct every moment.

"You were right, Bob, you were right," whispered Harry. "And if they are Indians, which we have no cause to doubt, we must take to our horses. It would be useless to stay here, anyway, for we can not help Dave. Poor fellow! Eternal happiness to his departed spirit!"

"Amen!" I fervently responded, with a pang of grief at thought of the poor, noble-hearted trapper.

Without further delay we started for our long-neglected steeds, which we had left by our dying fire.

Louder and louder grew the sound as we hurried on. Now we saw the faint gray light of dawn appearing in the east, and we knew we must not loiter if we wished to make our escape under cover of darkness, and that we did.

We found that our fire had completely died out. The three horses were there, just as we had left them, wandering about as far as their hitching-straps would permit, quietly crunching the rich young grass.

We leaped upon their backs, at the same time setting Delmer's free. Poor man! he would never ride it again. By this time he had, in all likelihood, gone to a world where dumb brutes were not needed.

"Come, now, let's away. The demons are well-nigh upon us," cried Harry, whirling his steed around, preparatory to dashing swiftly away in a north-easterly direction.

"Stay," I interposed. "Hold, a moment."

"What now?"

"Listen," I whispered, joyfully. "They are not Indians, after all."

"The deuce! How know you?"

"Don't you hear their singing?"

"Yes, by the good stars!" was the glad reply, "they are singing as sure's I live, and such a song as that never came from savage throats. They are whites, and that is a western trapper's song."

Our hearts beat high as we listened again. They were whites beyond a doubt. They were singing a rude trapper's song in low tones, their voices swelling in the chorus, then

lowering in rough cadence, while the hoofs of their steeds beat time to the tune on the hard turf.

All at once the song was abruptly terminated, the noise produced by the galloping horses ceased, and a silence like that of death succeeded!

"What does that mean?" whispered Harry.

Before I could answer, a gruff, stentorian voice called out: "Ho, thar! Who be ye? White or red?"

I knew that we were the ones addressed, and I made haste to answer.

"Whites!" I shouted. "We are friends, sir; come forward, if you please."

And they did come forward. They rode boldly up to us all evidently curious to take a look at us, and see who and what we were.

It was a party of men, five in number, all well mounted and armed to the teeth.

They were rough-looking characters, evidently honest, good-natured trappers, making their homes on the boundless prairies and among the mountains, accustomed to encountering wild beasts and wild men without a thought of fear.

They were all dressed nearly alike, and every one wore a heavy, bushy beard. Their gabs were similar to those worn by hunters in general. They possessed all the arms necessary to their class, and each man carried the indispensable rifle across the pommel of his saddle.

"Hello! who be ye?" blurted out a big, heavily-built fellow, as they rode up. This man seemed to be acting as leader of the party.

They all crowded round us, gazing curiously into our faces, as though men of their own color were rarely met with in their wanderings.

"I, sir, am Robert Graham," I replied, accepting the hand that had been extended to me; "and the name of my friend is Harry Sprague."

"Exactly—from the States, hey?"

"Yes, sir, from New York. We are on the plains for the first time, and, I suppose, are what you would call green 'uns!"

I had learned how to talk to old hunters, and this last re-

mark of mine created a quiet laugh among them. Apparently they were much pleased with my frankness.

We shook hands with all of them, learning their "handles," as they termed it, but I can now recall none of them but that of the leader.

His name was Jim Landers. He was a fair specimen of the western hunter, of gigantic frame, and seemingly without a superfluous supply of flesh to prevent gracefulness of carriage. His form was tall and erect. He was bold as a lion in time of danger, but prudent—a confirmed Indian-hater, as were the rest of the little band.

We learned that they were what is called "free trappers," and that they were traveling in the same direction that we were.

It was with great delight that we learned this latter fact, for now, though Dave Delmer should be really dead, we would not be compelled to continue our journey alone.

"You are on the move quite early," I remarked.

"Yas," returned Landers, "reckon 'tis purty 'arly, but it's gittin' light, though. The sun shines so warm these days, an' we kin make lots more time afore it rises, when it's cool. But tell us, young fellers, what bizness lev ye'way out hyar when ye b'long 'mong the States? Ye sartinly must be lost, ain't ye?"

"No, we are not exactly lost, though we really have been, or we would not have been here now."

"Hey, hey? Thort so."

Then, in as few words as possible, I related to our newly-found friends how Harry and I had started westward with the emigrant-train; how I had become lost, and found a true friend by the name of Dave Delmer, who promised to do all he could in the way of helping me out of my difficulty; how we fell in with Harry; and lastly, and more graphically, I related all that had occurred since our arrival at this stream of water, where Kirke Davereaux and his band prevented our further progress, and where the daring Dave Delmer met his death.

"Thunder! then thar's red-skins near us, hey?" exclaimed one of the hunters.

"There are," I answered. "They're just across the creek yonder, concealed behind a bluff."

THE TRAPPER'S LAST TRAIL.

"How many do they number?"

"I can not tell, but I think it is a small party, else they would have come out and slaughtered us without delay."

"Don't know 'bout that—"

"'Suh! Hark!" suddenly interrupted Jim Landers, peering through the morning twilight, toward the creek.

All were silent on the instant, some looking at Landers, and others attempting, like him, to pierce the fast-vanishing gloom between them and the river.

We heard a confused, clamorous sound, as of many tongues in motion, jabbering, chattering, in a tongue unknown to me.

We heard, too, a loud snorting, splashing and floundering, as of horses plunging reluctantly one by one into the water, and once a fierce oath and mandate, given in a deep, thundering voice, that plainly belonged to a white man.

Moreover, we could see the dim, phantom-like forms of several horsemen, riding slowly, but noisily, through the water, coming toward us unsuspectingly.

"That's them ar' Injuns ye bin talkin' 'bout, youngsters, an' they're a-goin' to ride right inter us, too," coolly declared a fellow near me.

"And we must fight?"

"Reckon so."

At this juncture Landers cried out, rapidly:

"We kin whip 'em, boys! thar's not more'n ten in all, an' we're seven. Come on, we'll meet 'em half-way. Now for some fun, boys! Foller me, all o' ye. Hurrah!"

This last word was shouted out at the top of his voice, and the Indians, who had now reached the shore, immediately ceased their clamor.

"Come!" shouted the sturdy trapper, and simultaneously we all put spurs to our animals.

Away we dashed with the speed of the wind toward the silent group of astonished individuals.

Harry and I did not bring up the rear, but kept in front beside the bold leader, determined to show them that we were not cowards as they were apt to suspect us, and well aware that there was no better way of securing their good-will.

As only a short distance intervened, a few long leaps of our animals took us almost upon the Indians.

They now seemed to see the necessity of flight, and with loud yells they discharged two or three rifles, while an arrow whizzed so close to Harry's head as to graze his cap!

"Fire, boys!" thundered Landers, when he saw that none of us were injured.

The command was promptly obeyed. Every one of us discharged his piece with a ringing cheer, and then, shouting wildly, dashed in among them, scattering them in every direction!

Some were killed and some wounded, as we could tell by the unearthly shrieks and loud groans that smote our ears.

I saw a horseman galloping madly toward me! Not an Indian, but a white man, the leader of the dusky band. It was Kirke Davereaux!

Well did I know him, although I had seen him but once before. He was a man that once seen was not easily forgotten, and now he appeared before me just as he did when first I saw him, riding upon his magnificent courser, whose smooth, glossy coat was black as coal.

He was coming straight toward me, as swiftly as his powerful steed could carry him. I saw that he was trying to escape, and that I, separated from the rest, was the only person between him and the open prairie.

His blazing black orbs were fastened upon me with a fierce determined look, as though he thought his safety depended on the killing of me, and nothing more. His right hand was raised aloft, and in it was poised a long lance, pointed full at me!

To remain idle was certain death, and if any thing was to be done it could not be done too quickly.

My gun was empty. The last ball that was in it was now, probably, in an Indian's brain, and I had not time to reload it. My pistols were both loaded. As quick as lightning I drew one forth and took hasty aim at the villainous outlaw.

Bang! A coarse, mocking laugh followed, almost drowned by the noise of the conflict around us. Yet it was distinctly heard, and it told me that the bullet had sped clear of the mark—that the renegade was still alive!

Before I could produce the other pistol I saw him throw back his hand to hurl the deadly spear at me.

The next instant it left his hands
In a twinkling I threw myself forward on my horse's neck,
to escape the terrible weapon, and thus saved my life.

I heard it cleave the air within two or three inches of my head, as it dart'd like a flash of lightning over my bowed form. But for that quick movement it would, beyond doubt, have pierced my body. As it passed over me, I heard, or fancied I heard, a slight scream near me, as of a female, but as I could not decide whence it came I concluded that it was fancy and nothing more.

When I straightened up again, Daveraux had swept past me. I looked around and saw him scouring over the prairie at a rate that was really wonderful.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHASE.

MUST I FOLLOW? Must I pursue the flying miscreant, and make another attempt to deprive him of his debased life?

Yes; my anger was aroused, and I paused not to think of the superior bottom of his horse. I thought only of shooting the monster. He had done his utmost to kill me, and now I would put forth every exertion to rid the world of him. Besides he had murdered a valued friend—he or one of his dastardly followers, and for that alone I fel: as if I could tear him to pieces! Dave had failed to obtain the revenge he had sought ~~it~~ so long and earnestly, and if it laid in my power to do the work for him I would do it. I might be able to avenge both him and the dear wife of his bosom, whose death had been the means of blasting his happiness so early in life.

AY, I WOULD FOLLOW HIM.

Wheeling my horse around, I dug the spurs into his sides, and away he sprung at the top of his speed after the retreating villain. Away over the level ground he sped, close behind the superb courser, his neck stretched forward till his

head was on a level with his back, and his whole mind (seemingly) on the chase.

This was the first time I had tried his speed since taking possession of him, in the grov~~d~~ where I was carried to the river in a log, and, consequently, I was not aware whether he was swift of foot or slow.

His agility exceeded my expectations. I had wronged him by deeming him a rather awkward specimen of his species, and it was with much surprise that I learned how widely I was at fault.

The first few springs he gained perceptibly on the powerful black, and then he shot ahead like an arrow. I gave him the rein, and, finding no more use for them, ceased plying the spurs. He needed it not. He appeared to be interested in the chase, and as desirous of winning the race as I. Possibly, the powerful black had aroused his jealousy.

The space between pursuer and pursued did not continue to decrease. Davereaux, seeing how well I was mounted, dug the cruel spurs into the glossy sides of his horse, and then the distance between us began to slowly but steadily increase. Strive as I would to prevent it, I continued to lose ground.

Allowing things to proceed thus, would, I knew, be a certain failure of success on my part.

How could I prevent it?

There was one opportunity left, and *only* one. Of that I determined to avail myself.

Hastily thrusting my hand into the inside pocket of my hunting-shirt, I produced the remaining pistol, and quickly cocked it. Carefully, deliberately, I aimed it at the tall, erect figure of Kirke Davereaux, and discharged it.

A deep groan told me that the bullet had sped true to its aim.

I saw the man reel in his saddle, toss his hands wildly in the air, and then, with another loud groan, fall heavily to the ground. I had killed him; had killed the wicked reprobate, who deserved, and would undoubtedly receive much greater punishment than that which I had inflicted upon him. Dave had hunted him for years to do the work that I had done, but had failed, and had I not thought of the honest trapper lying lifeless, scalpless, a mangled corpse, I would not have been so willing to shed the blood of the lawless desperado.

No sooner had his rider fallen from his back, than the noble horse stopped, and stood motionless beside him, waiting, apparently, for him to remount.

I checked the speed of my horse, and rode slowly forward.

As I neared the animal who stood so quietly beside his prostrate master, what was my surprise on finding that he had another rider!

It was really the case. Another person, more slight in form, now occupied the saddle where Davereaux had sat a short time before. This person I had not seen before.

It was a female, as I could plainly see. The sun was just making his appearance in the east, and the earth was no longer wrapped in darkness. At first her appearance there puzzled me, and I wondered whence she came so suddenly, but then I saw the absurdity of speculating on such a question. She must have been in the saddle when Davereaux was, else she could not have been there now.

I now remembered the scream I had heard when the lance was hurled at me, and I no longer deemed it a mere fancy of mine. This girl must have been with the villain then, riding behind him, probably—or, more likely, in front, for even there she might have escaped my eye.

But who was she? She was not an Indian, but very plainly a white girl.

A sudden thought came to me. Delmer had said that his daughter was stolen away by this same man with whom I now found her.

Could this be that daughter? The sweet Bessie he loved so dearly, and prized above every thing else in the wide world? To be sure it could; who else could it be? It was more likely she than any one else. The result of this thought was an abrupt arrival at the conclusion that this was none other than Bessie, the daughter of the fallen trapper, Dave Delmer!

Her face was turned toward me as I rode up, giving me a good view of it.

She was beautiful. I saw that Dave's description of her had not been in the least exaggerated. In fact, he had not done justice to her—words could not. I thought that never before had it fallen to my lot to behold such beauty in woman. Her features were exactly regular; her lips full and pout-

ing, and tempting enough to make any old bachelor think of changing his mind in regard to remaining single all his life. Her exquisitely-rounded cheeks were delicately tinted with the hue of the rose; her eyes large, soft, and baxtrous, and seemingly capable of looking into one's very soul! Her hair was dishevelled, hanging loosely about her lovely face in many a little ring, softly brushing the velvet cheek, and then falling in graceful waves about her shoulders, and down till it swam the horse's back.

Could I have seen her in all her wondrous beauty when she first appeared to me so suddenly and unexpectedly, I might have found but little difficulty in imagining that she had just dropped from the heavens!

She was dressed in the manner of an Indian—more like an Indian queen than a common squaw. Her dress was short, reaching but little below the knee. It was of a blood-red color, and profusely adorned with curious and artistic devices containing every different hue the mind could conceive.

The leggins were heavily fringed, and otherwise beautified by a tasteful embroidery of needle-work, while the moccasins, ornamented with motley beads, were small and well made, fitting neatly the feet they incased. She wore a light mantle, clasped about the neck and thrown back over her shoulders, so that at present it did little or no service. This also was spangled with curious figures of every color imaginable.

She sat gracefully in the saddle, as though she were perfectly at home there.

Her eyes were bent upon me with a look of mingled gratitude and curiosity as I neared her.

I really believe I should have fallen in love with the queen-like creature on the spot, but for the sweet, lovely face that rose before my mind's eye, telling me that my heart could be none other's while my darling Imogene, far away in her city home, claimed it as her own.

After staring at the strange female rather rudely, perhaps, for a moment or so, I awakened to a sense of my duty.

I was very near to her now, and lifting my hat and bowing politely, said: "Fine morning, ma'am."

The blush deepened on her cheeks, as, with a sweet smile and a graceful inclination of the shapely head, she replied:

"Yes, sir."

Adding, almost in the same breath, and in a clear, silvery voice:

"Sir, I find that you are a stranger, but you have done me a great service, for which I beg of you to accept my heartfelt thanks. But for your timely interference, that man, lying dead now at our horses' feet, would have borne me away to the home of the Sioux, where, he said, I should live as his wife. Sir, I assure you I can never forget you for the service you have rendered me."

"Thank you, fair lady," I said. "Those words amply repay me for what I have done. And yet, I did nothing that any one, but a brute, would not have done. I knew not that you were with this man until I had killed him, and it is well that I did not, for had I known it I could not have induced myself to shoot when there was so much danger of killing you instead of him."

"Who are you, sir?—if I may ask," interrogated the lovely maiden.

"My name?" I answered, "is Robert Graham. Yours, I believe, is Miss Delmer?"

She looked surprised.

"You mistake, sir," said she, "my name is *not* Delmer, but Graham!"

I started, and bent a piercing look upon the strange beauty to see if I could detect a resemblance in her to any of my relatives. There was nothing familiar in her face.

Her name was Graham. At first I was inclined to be incredulous, but when I reflected what a common name 't was, I saw that to bear it she need not necessarily be related to me.

"A strange coincidence, truly," I said, smiling, "that we should bear the same appellation. But really I thought you were one Bessie Delmer, daughter of an old trapper calling himself Dave Delmer. He told me that his daughter was captured and his wife murdered by this same man who was carrying you away."

Before she could reply a feeble voice reached our ears from under our horses' feet.

"Tell him—tell John Graham to forgive—to—to forgive me?"

We looked down just in time to see Kirke Davereaux breathe his last!

"He is dead," said the girl, in a sad voice.

"Who is John Graham?" I asked.

"He is my father, sir," she said, and then her eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled as she continued: "He was killed but a short time ago, near midnight I believe, by an Indian. The Indians were behind yon bluff, and there were three whites on the opposite side of the river. I thought you were one of the party."

"You were right—I was," said I.

"Were you? Then why do you ask who John Graham is? He was with you, and he crossed the river and was shot."

I looked curiously at her, puzzled for a time by what she had said.

Then the truth flashed upon me—my eyes were opened. The old hunter, in whom I had found such a warm friend, had been sailing under false colors!

In other words I knew only by a fictitious name my trapper friend. He was in reality John Graham, but, for what reason I could not guess, he had cast aside his real name, and assumed that of Dave Delmer.

If I had conjectured rightly, and I was almost positive that I had, this, after all, was the stolen daughter of which Dave had spoken when giving us his history.

"Isn't your Christian name Bessie?" I inquired, in order to ascertain whether I was right or not.

"It is," she promptly answered.

"Then," said I, "I think I understand the case thoroughly. He whom I have known as Delmer is your father, for he told me the story of his wife's death and of your capture by that fellow, his former rival. You were with a family named Lawrence at the time of your capture, were you not?"

"Right, sir," said she. "And he told you all this?"

I nodded assent.

"Then he and you are very intimate?"

"Yes, although we were together but a few days we grew to be very intimate. I owe him my life. When first we met I was hungry, weary, foot-sore, and lost on the wide prairie.

He befriended me! He gave me food, and promised to guide me to a place of safety. He was fulfilling his promise, when our progress was hindered by Davereaux and his band. He crossed the stream for the sole purpose of shooting Davereaux, and thus avenging the murder of his wife and the abduction of his daughter. You are as well aware as I that the bold act resulted fatally to him. It was for that reason, knowing that he was no more for this world, that I shot his old enemy whom he had long sought for that purpose."

Bessie turned her head away, as if to hide the tears she could not repress. After a short silence she looked up and said:

"Sir, I am friendless now. Not one—"

"No, no," I interrupted; "say not that. I know the death of your good father leaves you alone in the world, but, if you will accept the friendship of a comparative stranger, I am at your service. My friend, Harry Sprague, and myself, will help you if it is in our power to do so."

"Thank you, sir," she said, earnestly. "You are very kind. How can I ever repay you?"

"Don't think that any thing we can do will place you under obligations to us," I hastened to say. "We are in duty bound to help you, out of gratitude to your father, to whom we owe so much. But come, let us return. The fight is over now, and I see our friends are left masters of the field."

Without more ado we gave our horses the word, and side by side we rode slowly toward the river, where Harry and the trappers were waiting for us.

We left the silent corpse of the outlaw to the mercy of voracious animals and birds of prey.

We were greeted by Jim Landers and his band with a loud cheer. We found that the trappers had gained the victory without the loss of a single man. Five Indians, all silent in death, were strewn around, lying in pools of blood and purple gore, with eyes wide open and glazed, faces upturned and horribly distorted. Five were all that were slain, besides their white leader. The rest had fled.

Bessie attracted much attention from the rude but kind-hearted hunters. I heard one fellow whisper to a comrade "that he never see'd such a bootiful critter!" Landers, in his

characteristic way, congratulated me on my good fortune in rescuing such a lovely maiden, and all expressed their willingness to escort her to any place she wished to go. The poor girl could only thank them. Her heart was so full that she could not speak without weeping.

Harry could hardly keep his eyes off of her, and when I had introduced them, he at once entered into conversation with her!

I left them alone, and turned to Landers.

"Come," said I, "let us cross the stream and see that the body of Dave Delmer is decently interred. He is the father of this girl. His real name is Graham, she tells me, though, of course, not a relative of mine."

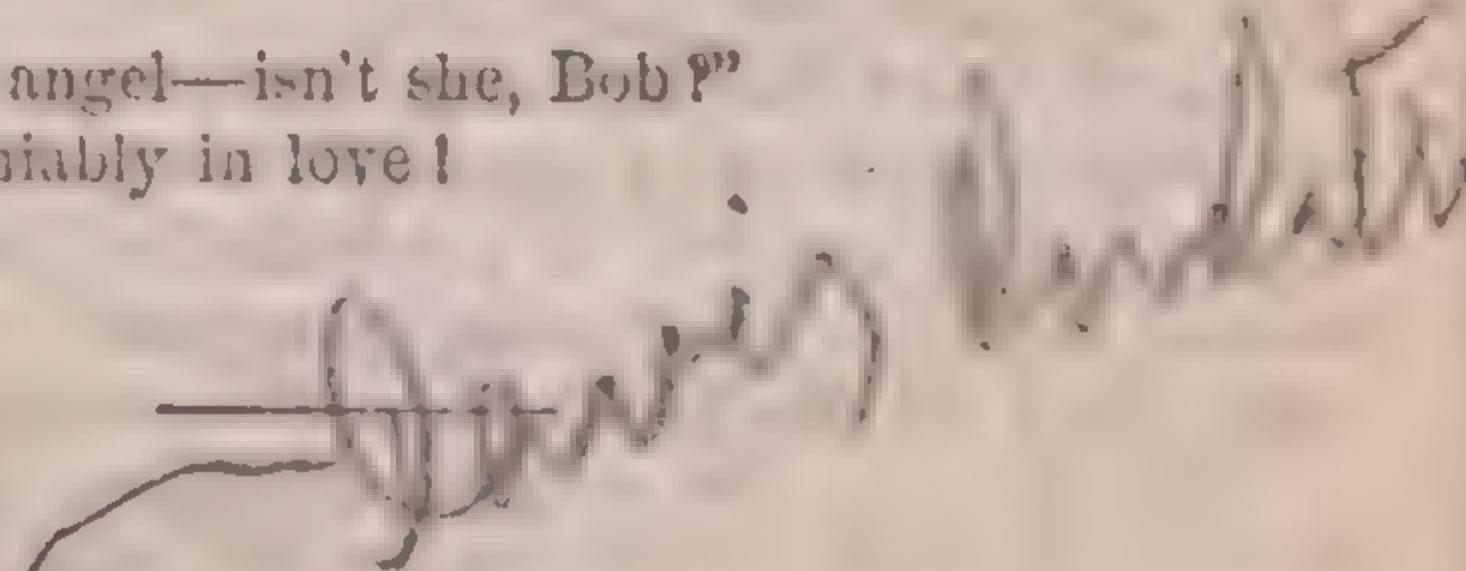
"Quite a coincidence," put in Harry.

Jim Landers gave his men the command, and we all plunged into the water and started toward the opposite shore, to pay the last tribute of respect to the poor trapper.

Bessie and Harrie rode abreast, and once, when an opportunity offered, Harry leaned over and whispered excitedly in my ear:

"She's a perfect angel—isn't she, Bob?"

Harry was undeniably in love!



CHAPTER XIV.

REVELATION.

WE found the body of the old hunter lying where he had fallen, his life-blood staining the green grass to a crimson hue.

His eyes were closed, and his face was as white as marble. One hand, covered with blood, was clutching the saturated and stiffened clothing that covered his breast, where a small, dark stream was still flowing from the wound.

His scalp he still retained. The cap had fallen from his head, and we could see that not a hair of his scalp had been touched by violent hands. This, we learned, had been saved

by Bessie. Her tearful pleading had caused her father's slayer who was none other than Davereaux himself, to command his braves to leave the white's scalp undisturbed.

The hunter was, to all appearance, dead. He was as motionless as the ground on which he lay. It was hardly probable that he could live so long after receiving such a wound.

Bessie, Jim Landers, Harry Sprague and myself dismounted, the others being requested to remain in their saddles till called upon to assist in scooping out a grave.

Bessie, sobbing as if her heart would break, dropped down upon her knees beside him, and kissed the cold, white forehead. Instantly she clasped her hands and cried :

"He lives—he lives!"

"How know you?" I asked, quickly, kneeling opposite her.

"Why, sir, the eyelids quivered. Oh, he lives! I know he lives!" and her face brightened with hope—a hope that I feared was vain.

I produced a small flask, that I luckily carried, filled with brandy, and forced a few drops of the liquid down his throat.

"Perhaps that will revive him."

Scarcely had I said this when the eyelids quivered again.

"Ah, I see you are right," I said. "Life is not quite extinct as yet."

The words had just fallen from my lips when the eyes slowly opened. It was with joy that I saw in them the light of reason. Though so nearly gone he was yet rational.

The first thing they encountered was the face of his weeping daughter who was bending so eagerly over him. His countenance lighted up, a faint smile moved his bearded lips, and he took one of her small, white hands in his.

"Bessie, child," he faintly articulated, "kin it be that you are still alive?"

"Yes, father, I am," returned the maiden, her tears flowing afresh. "But, oh! say that you are not—tell me that you are not dying!"

"Tiar, Bessie, don't do that. It makes me feel bad to see ye grieve so. I am dyin'. I'm goin' to that land whar the angels live, an' whar eternal happiness reigas. I know I'll go thar, 'cause I've been prayin', Bessie—been prayin' like yo

used to do, an' like yer mother did. I'll meet her that She'll be the best angel 'mong 'em."

The girl wept bitterly. There was a world of pity in the look he gave her then, and I saw a tear steal slowly down his rough cheek.

"Don't, don't!" he pleaded, tremulously. "Ye only make it harder fur me to give up life."

At this juncture I was about to rise and step aside from the unhappy girl and her fast-failing parent, but was checked by the trapper himself. As yet he had not seen me, and looking up, he asked of his daughter:

"Bessie, what's become o' that young man?"

"Who, father? What young man?"

"Why, Bob Graham. *Don't ye know what he is?* I *must* see him before I go!" and he seemed greatly troubled.

"He is here, father, kneeling beside you," said she, pointing to me.

"Yes, my friend, I am here," I added, bending with an aching heart over the man I had learned to love so well.

He looked at me with a glad smile. I wondered why he was so desirous of seeing me before death should separate him from this wicked world, and I bent my head to listen.

"Robert," said he, "I am very glad that ye are hyar, fur I'm goin' fast, an' I hav somethin' of importance to tell ye."

"But first, Dave," I interposed, "tell me if something can not be done for you. Do you really think you are beyond all hope of recovery? Maybe your wound can be healed."

He shook his head sadly.

"No, my lad, ye can't do nothin', so take yer hand away frum that. I'm a goner, an' all ye could do woul'd do no good. That villain's bullet went clean through me."

"Do you mean Davereaux?"

"Yas, it wur he that done this, an' then he made good his escape. I thort that I would some day obtain a chance o' payin' him off fur murderin' my wife, but now that time is past. Hyarafter, he will live with the knowledge that I am not on his trail."

"Wrong, sir," I said. "Davereaux is at this very moment lying dead on the other side of the river. I knew you were

shot, and I resolved that he should not live. I killed him, and thus avenged both your wife and yourself."

"Wid! did you finish him, Robert?"

"I did."

"That's awful good news. I kin die easier now, knowin' that my fate is no worse than his. Thank ye fur doin' the work that I thort was left entirely undone. It's as good as if I had done it myself. But, Robert," he continued, "I must not exhaust my breath in talkin' 'bout that. Times precious, an' I've got somethin' fur yer ear yet."

"Tell me, then, Dave. I am listening."

"Wal, in the first place, then, I must tell ye that my real name are not Dave Delmer."

"I know that; your daughter told me that your proper name is John Graham."

"Right, youngster, an' I s'pose ye think it just come by chance that we both bear the same title. Reckon Bessie didn't tell ye of the relation existin' between us, 'cause she don't know about it."

"Relation?" I cried. "What mean you by that? You do not—you certainly can not mean—"

Hare the hunter made a gesture for me to desist, and then he went on:

"Robert Graham, has it never struck ye that I resemble yer father?"

What could he mean? I looked at him closely, to make sure that he was still in full possession of his senses, and then drawing back, I shook my head and answered, hesitatingly:

"No, it never has. I have but a faint remembrance of my father. He died when I was a child."

"Ah, dead is he?" and the trapper seemed much moved by the intelligence.

"He is," I answered.

"Wal, boy, ye didn't know that he wur my brother, did ye?"

"No, no, you can not mean that!" I exclaimed, incredulously.

"But I do mean it, boy," said he, earnestly. "Ef I was ever serious, I am now. This, ye should know, is not the time fur jestin'."

"But—but—"

"Never mind, Bob, it may surprise ye, but I kin prove it." And while I remained silent and confused he went on, calmly and deliberately:

"I say ag'in that yer father wur my brother, an' my only brother, too. I wur several years younger than him, an' we wur orphans. Fur a few years we lived together in Massouri, an' then he went to New York an' married. He wanted me to come thar an' live with him then, but I preferred the West, an' so I staid."

Here he paused as if to note the effect his words produced on me.

What he had said was by no means new to me. I had heard my mother tell more than once about my father and his younger brother, John; how they were left relationless and friendless at an early age; how my father, leaving his brother, went to New York, married, entered into business with his rich father-in-law, and died a few years after the birth of his first and only child.

But for many years we had thought the younger brother dead, as we never received a reply to any of the letters written him.

Was this the man? Was this that uncle I thought I would never see in this world? It *could* be he. I had often heard of things happening that were much more wonderful.

"Tell me, what was my father's name?" I whispered, excitedly.

"James," was the prompt reply.

"Right!" I cried, joyfully. "Oh, I know it is true now! I know you are my uncle!"

"Yas, Robert, I sartinly am yer uncle. Yer the pictur' o' yer father, Robert, an' that's the reason I looked at ye so clus when we fust met. When I farn't yer handle, then I wur almost sure that ye wur the son o' my brother. I didn't know but what ye wur all dead, as I couldn't never hear frum ye."

"This is too good to be true!" I ejaculated, stealing a glance at Bessie, who was gazing alternately at the dying man and me, as if unable to comprehend the meaning of our conversation.

She was my cousin; the beautiful creature—the angel on earth! It all seemed much more like a dream than reality. I had found an uncle that had long been mourned as dead—had found him just as the grim monster, Death, had seized upon his vitals. I had found a cousin as beautiful as Venus, pure in thought, of mild disposition—a cousin that any one might be proud of.

"Bessie," and the trapper took the hand of his daughter—"Bessie, this youngster is yer cousin. Hev ye nothin' to say to him?"

"Is he, father, the son of your brother of whom I have frequently heard you speak?"

"Yes."

She extended her soft little hand, with a sweet smile, saying:

"This is indeed a happiness to me."

"And an honor to me," I added.

"Robert," gasped the trapper, his voice and breath failing fast, "I leave her to yer care, to yer protection. She is all I hav on earth. Take her to yer city home, fur she has no other. Promise to grant me this one favor, the last I will ever ask of ye."

"Any thing, any thing," I answered. "All that I can do for you I will do. Fear not for her safety. I will protect her till death shall deprive me of that pleasure, and the home of my good mother shall be hers."

These words elicited thanks from both father and daughter, and the latter began to weep again, as she saw the film gathering over the slowly-closing eyes of her father.

"ROBERT," said he, "I'm goin' fast. Ye'll find 'round my neck a pictur' o' my wife which I want Bessie to keep forever. Bury me in my clothes—all my arms with me. Good-by! good-by! Bessie, please don't cry! Whar's Harry Sprague?"

Harry, hearing his name spoken, came quickly forward, and grasped a hand of the dying man with a sad, "Farewell, farewell!"

"Pray for me, Bessie, pray for me."

But Bessie could not. She was sobbing too violently, and he repeated the request to me.

I complied as best I could. The trappers respectfully bared their heads, while I sent up a short but fervent prayer to heaven for the only brother of my deceased father.

When I had finished, I looked up and saw that there was not a dry eye in the assembly.

The trapper's lips moved, and bending down I heard him murmur:

"Thank you, thank you."

"One thing more," I said, hurriedly, recalling the outlaw's message. "The last words of Kirke Davereaux, were a petition to you for forgiveness."

A cloud swept over his features at the mention of that name. After a little hesitation, he spoke:

"God forgive him—I can not!"

Another moment and my uncle, John Graham—Dave Delmer—was dead.

The remains of the noble-hearted trapper were interred according to his request, with his rifle and other arms beside him, and none of his clothing removed. In digging his grave all worked with a will, though it was long and tedious labor, as the only instruments employed in the operation were our knives.

A small, gold locket, containing the picture of his former wife, was found suspended from his neck by a red ribbon. Also, a picture of himself and brother—my father—which was additional proof that he was what he declared himself to be.

The tears of his daughter, nephew, and warm friend, Harry Sprague, fell like rain on the damp earth, which confined in its dark resting-place all that was mortal of the brave hunter. His grave is on the bank of one of the tributaries of the Platte, near a huge, rocky bluff, that overlooks the stream and prairie for miles around. It may possibly be seen to this day, though it is doubtful, for it is very likely that time has obliterated all traces of it.

There is little more to add. Jim Landers conducted us safely through the "South Pass," nor left us till he saw us ensconced in a fort west of the Rocky Mountain slope, among people of our own color. Here we joined a party about to

start for California, as we concluded to take the steamer from there and return home by water in preference to another journey across the plains.

Arrived at San Francisco I wrote a long letter to my mother, relating to her in brief all that has been told to the elder, and requesting her to prepare for the reception of a lovely niece.

Shortly after, we embarked for a voyage "round the Horn." We reached New York in safety, and were warmly welcomed by friends and relatives.

Years have flown. My cousin Bessie—now Bessie Sprague—is the happy wife of a noble and upright man, and by his side, with his arm to protect her, she treads the path of life, well supplied with every thing that goes to make this earthly existence one of happiness and contentment.

THE END.

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